

j. h. martin : hannah craig : karen quevillon : beatriz seeleander : jessica lee richardson : t. r. north : carmen carrión : daniel balenger : sean patrick whiteley : vincente poturica : grant price : clio velentza : phoebe cramer : jordan bolay : shannon connor winward : dom fonce : ana prundaru : margarita serafimova : robert keith : mary buchinger : mark blickley & amy bassin : ryan rivas : tracie morris : emily strauss : desmond herzfelder : ashley owens : andréa acker : jennie macdonald : megan larmie

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ISSUE 3: MYTHOS

Myth-making is the richest of human traditions, striving to make sense of the absurd and unforgiving nature of the universe. The earliest myths were poetic responses to the the natural world. All writing makes myth.

In this issue, we see attempts at constructing a modern mythology. In Imaginações, stories allude to the myths we are most familiar with: Genesis, the concept of paradise, and Native American stories. Others are experiments in the creation of personal mythologies. The Essais section grounds us in the narrative connections of memory. Poesia's poets have crafted explorations into politics as myth-making, myth-making as direct response to art--arguably myth-making as a community building endeavor, and the interrelationship of language acquisition and myth, how language divides can mythologize the other.

Imagination and identity are inseparable. In this issue (and throughout history) both are rooted in image. Our contributing authors come from all over the globe and possess many native tongues. The myths we claim by our cultural ties, bring us joy and dysfunction: they signify a way of knowing and a way of casting doubt. We hope this issue sheds some light (and darkness) on the process.

The Editorial Team, Obra / Artifact



A SECONDHAND STORY

BEATRIZ SEELEANDER

My father, tired from working all day, would lie on the carpet next to my bed and tell the same story. That story we both knew by heart, in word order, in intonation, and in extensive trivial information we had come up with in the years and years of listening to ourselves tell it. This is the first story I ever heard: the tale of the Manjaleo beast.

Don't let yourself be fooled by the title; the story's namesake, a terrifying animal with the wings of a bat and the teeth of a lion and the claws of a tiger is hardly present until the very end of the story. Granted, you knew it would show eventually, so there was a sense of suspense, but with a name like that there was little even the most creative kid could do other than waiting for the big reveal.

The narrative began in death, just like any decent fairy tale. It started with an old man dying a long time ago in Portugal. This story, in fact, comes from Portuguese folklore, although I believe we have adapted it quite a bit. When you listen to a story every day, details tend to be added and phrases edited, and it can change without you ever noticing. Little by little, we recite it by heart until it is completely different from the original version. I guess this is how folklore is supposed to work, and how it did work before someone started writing down stories.

I didn't like the old man dying like that. He reminded me of my father simply because he was a father as well, and I didn't like thinking that my dad would die, and I liked to think parents were immortal. But, in the beginning, the old man said "Kids, I am a hundred years old, and I think I am going to die." That was much too dreary for a five year old — however, and as soon as I realized one could change the parts one doesn't like in a story, I told my father the old man dying was not dying, really, but simply going very far away. So the original tale, in which he immediately after professing his premonitions let out a cough and collapsed on the ground, was altered to a lighter, PG version of the incident, in which he retired from his job and moved to Florida just like any other hundred year-old.

"In his will, he had left each of his children one watermelon. Oh, I forgot about telling you that—you can never forget about this detail when telling this story—otherwise you have to go all the way back and explain that, before dying (sorry, going away), the old man had very specifically instructed his sons to crack the watermelons open only in close proximity to water. See, inside the three watermelons lived three thirsty fairies who would grant them three presents in exchange for a single drop of water. Why he would not just say that to his children remains a mystery. Why he would be keeping fairies inside watermelons is also a question that comes to mind. Had he imprisoned those poor

creatures and left them there, just in case he ever needed their services? Was he some kind of fairy smuggler? I don't like thinking about this, because to me the old man had always been kind and wonderful, like a nice thoughtful grandpa.

Here is where the tale gets didactic, and we are informed of the dangers of not following one's parents' commands. Right after their father announced his retirement from life, the three brothers packed their watermelons and parted ways as well. The first brother, a very bad-mannered young boy, had laughed at his father's advice and opened his watermelon far away from the water, and so he watched the desperate fairy die right in front of him."

"I didn't know fairies could die, dad."

"Oh, sweetie, fairies are just like humans, except they are magical. And when they die, they turn into flowers," my father provided.

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"What flower?"

"Roses."

"Hum."

"What's wrong with roses?"

"Every time there's a flower in a story, it's a rose."

"Fine, then. She turned into a daisy."

"No! God, whenever it can't be a rose, it's a daisy!"
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"Fine. She turned into an azalea."

"No. You said she turned into a rose so she turned into a rose. She can be an azalea next time," I said.

"The second son, who was not bad-natured, but rather susceptible to temptation, suddenly found himself in a wide desert to which he could not find the way out. Eventually defeated by his own thirst, the boy cracked his watermelon open, only to find it hollow but for a fairy. He and the fairy died in the desert."

I asked my dad why the susceptible boy had had it worse than the evil one.

"The third son, by contrast, walked miles and miles with swollen feet carrying his watermelon and did not stop until he found a river. There, he gently cracked his fruit open and out came a fairy. "Give me water or give me milk, kindly gentleman," she said. Actually, all of the watermelon fairies had said that, but repetition in prose isn't as exciting as it can be when spoken out loud.

After being properly rehydrated, the fairy told the boy that as a reward she would disclose to him three very important pieces of information which had up until then been unjustly kept from him. One was that he had three sisters married to powerful misters. Two was that every intelligent fella payed a visit to Castella. Finally, three was that there over the high hill he'd find two giants in need of some guidance with their father's will. The fairy said goodbye, and my father promised me that when she died she would become not a rose but a myosotis. This was where I learned the word "myosotis".

"When he got there, the giants were fighting, which was causing a light earthquake in the surrounding area. Patiently the boy asked them what the matter was, and he was informed the disagreement had been caused by their father having left them three treasures, but there being only two of them, they knew not how to distribute the inheritance."

**

You must be wondering why everything in this story comes in threes - three brothers and three sisters and three pieces of fruit; and three objects and three secrets and everything in three. I think lots of fairy tales go this way. Three is the magic number for teaching lessons; just think of the three little pigs: one is for failure, two is for trial; third time's the charm. Hay and wood and brick. The rule of twos is more of a modern concept inspired by the helpless dichotomies of the present era. In the world of fairy tale, characters come in and out of the cauldron of narrative necessity, and their individualities depend more on their particular actions than their generic psychological troubles.

Don't get me wrong, I am extremely fond of the novel as the result of the existential gap occupying the lungs of most individuals, but sometimes it's nice to define a narrative in terms of content rather than of absence. In fairy tales characters just turn up, and things just happen- and they require no explanation whatsoever. But this is getting too theoretical; back to the high hill.

"Worry not, said the boy to the giants, we will flip a coin and the winner shall get the extra present. Out of options, the giants agreed to hand the boy the three treasures, them being a master key to all doors in the world, magic boots able to take he who wore them anywhere they wanted, and a scrappy, but trustworthy invisibility rag."

Despite the tale's constant insistence on the concept of the boy as moral compass, I'm thinking the person who added this particular section was not as committed to spreading morals as most, for this is when the boy tricks the giants and, with the help of the invisibility rag and the magic boots, runs away with all three treasures. My father always

warned me during that part not to hand my belongings to strangers, no matter how well-intentioned they may seem.

"Where is the tiny creature? Show yourself," one of the giants protested. 'I'm in your brother's nose,' the boy answered, causing one giant to punch the other in the nose. 'You idiot!' the punched one cried, while the boy shouted, he was now standing on the other brother's foot, which resulted in violent thumping. This sequence went on for a long time, but the premise stayed the same. Eventually the boy got tired and told the boots to take him to his first recently discovered sister."

It turned out his sister lived in the bottom of the ocean, and the powerful mister she had married was a fish. He was, in fact, the King of Fish. At first, I was confused as to why a girl would marry a fish, but his other sisters were, too, respectively married to a ram and a pigeon, who were also kings to their respective herd and flock. All in all, it was just a family quirk.

"Any boy less accepting of others would have found it hard to bear such shame to his family name and disowned them for these unconventional marriage options, but the prospect of having sisters was much too exciting for him to turn down, and so he listened to the story the Queen of Fish told him at the dinner table, over salmon and cod and flounder. When they were young, she said, she and her sisters were kidnapped by a man with a moustache and a blonde lady who had tricked them into the back of a van to see puppies—"

"But, dad, did vans exist back then?"

"Fine, it was a dark alley. The woman told her that's where the puppies were and when they got there they couldn't see anything apart from the insides of the bag into which they had been unceremoniously tossed. The kidnapper had a rather creepy theme song, in which he announced what he was going to do with the children: 'The hair I'll turn into wigs / their flesh I'll be serving for dinner / their skin will make for good leather / come, and gather all the sinners!'"

Obviously, this was not very appropriate for children—or people of any age, for that matter—but children were always the ones to get the most laughs out of this. Even with my never being able to pinpoint why exactly this was such a fine cue for incessant giggling, I still think it's got something to do with the realization that things can be made out of things; and that things can be made out of people. Up until then, the line between

the living and the inanimate had felt wider than the horizon. A pile of hair cut out, dead skin, even fingernails when you threw them in the trash; those things held an interesting position somewhere in the middle of that line. To think they had other things inside them felt like a discovery of incomparable proportions. I thought that there must have been extensions of me all over the world.

"You were not the only one to be creeped out by the kidnapper's theme song, for his horse was so mortified by his evil plans that, immediately, he stopped trotting and with all force dropped his mounter on the floor. The kidnapper now unconscious, the horse tried to untie the knot keeping the girls inside the bag—he was nonetheless unsuccessful in that hooves were completely useless when it comes to knots. The horse then called for his animal friends—a fish and a pigeon and a ram—more practiced at the art of untying than he. With his prominent beak, the pigeon cut through the rope. Now that I come to think about it, though, I don't know why the others were called in to help. I don't even know how the fish was supposed to be just perfectly okay outside of the water, although, he was the sovereign of Fish. Besides, if we are going to start pinpointing incoherencies in this story, then it would all fall apart right before us. The fish could breathe out of water and the people could breathe under it, and that was all normal; thank you very much. What do you know about this faraway kingdom of Portugal, after all?

After having had plenty of fish and promising his sister to keep in touch, the boy told the giants' boots to take him to his second sister. He suddenly saw himself surrounded by several sheep, covered in wool, and he saw ram, lambs, and ewe hopping everywhere. The king of sheep and his wife welcomed him to yet another banquet, and this time, he ate lamb chops."

"Dad, why do they eat their own offspring?" I asked.

"They probably only ate the stillborn and the criminals, and maybe the very old ones because society is not kind to the elderly.

The next day he went to visit his third sister in the sky, where the pigeon kingdom was located. He walked on the clouds made out of cotton candy and met with his sister and her husband, had a wonderful salad, since all pigeons agreed on how awful they tasted when roasted, and said goodbye.

Now that the boy had checked in with two of the three tips delivered by the fairy, it was time for him to prove himself an intelligent fella and go to visit Castella. Castella used to be one of the four (very real) kingdoms which would later, with the marriage of Isabel de Castella and Fernando de Aragon, come to form the country of Spain. Isabel de Castella was also responsible for Christopher Columbus' discovery of America.

Upon his arrival, the boy immediately saw a huge gathering of men around an old

tower. Up from the tower another man spoke. He was informing the male population that whoever was first in solving the king's riddle would be presented with the princess' hand in marriage. The riddle went like this: what is it, my, what is it that walks with four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon and three at night?"

The answer may seem fairly obvious, but it was actually quite difficult for everyone in the story. It is also elegant foreshadowing, for when we meet the Manjaleo. You see, the Manjaleo beast keeps very strict eating habits: in the morning he eats children, in the afternoon, he has adults, and at night his meal consists of bony old people. Furthermore, we see here another fine example of the rule of threes: youth and adulthood and old age. Even the story is divided in three parts, when you think about it: the watermelon fairies, the sisters, and now finally, the Manjaleo.

"Your Majesty, the creature you talk about is no other than the human being," the boy declared with a smug smile. The king, returned his smile and addressed the crowd. 'We have a winner!' he said, and so the boy married the princess of Castella and went to live in the castle.

In what seems like a trait which one too many female characters are assigned, however, the princess of Castella, though kind; was a bit of an air-head. One day she happened to find in her husband's things a key to which she could not match a door. The only door she could think of which might answer to that key was one in the high tower: the door her father never let open.

With a deep breath she unlocked the door. It led to an empty room and another door. Beware! Go no further!; read a warning glued to the door. The princess, however, ignored it. The next room was empty but for some dog bones by the wall. It led to yet another door and another warning: Great danger ahead! Unless you are Carl, do not go in! Carl, ignore this warning.

This went on for a while. Room, door, room, warning, door, a couple of skeletons, door."

Like I said, children enjoy repetition- and you always hoped that this time she would do the smart thing and pay attention to the great danger warnings. Eventually, she saw him: the Manjaleo, with his tiger claws and lion teeth and bat wings and duck feet.

"Duck feet?"

"Yes, and he was very self-conscious about them. Bring them up near him and you're dead," my father said. Now, you're probably wondering why the king kept this monster in his castle. Perhaps he was waiting for an opportunity to use him as a weapon in the battle with the caliphs, supposing history then was the same history now, and the Spanish were battling the Muslim world. Maybe he, just like the boy's father, was involved in suspicious activities involving the smuggling of magical creatures. In any case, all of this could have been avoided had the king simply disclosed to the princess the fact that he was keeping a mortal beast in the high tower."

To declare The Manjaleo Beast a coming of age tale is doubtlessly a stretch, but one can't help but notice the element of parental secrecy as catalyst to all tragedies in the story. The journeys of both the boy and the princess feature a discovery of figurative and literal skeletons in a fathers' closet/tower/watermelon. One is encouraged to think that the best way to face these challenges is to follow parental advice strictly and unquestionably, always assuming they have one's best interests at heart.

"The princess of Castella—disobedient air-head that she was—was instantly captured by the Manjaleo and taken as hostage to facilitate his escape. The desperate king went to his son-in-law in need of a solution. He would have killed the beast a long time ago, he told the boy, if only he knew how. No venom worked on the beast, no amount of arrows pierced him, and he laughed off all attempts known to man to cease him once and for all.

The boy asked the king whether he thought the princess was still be alive. 'Oh, certainly she is. The Manjaleo ate grown people only from 1pm to 6pm,' the king said. They had a seven-hour window. Promptly the boy unpacked his invisibility rag and his magic boots, ordering them to show him to the princess of Castella.

When he got there, the Manjaleo was out. "Listen, I don't have much time," he told her. I need you to find out how to kill the beast. They heard the ridiculous sound of duck feet stepping through running water, and the boy covered himself again in the rag.

The princess did as asked. Once the Manjaleo was settled and satisfied with his supper, she began: 'My father tells me they could never kill you. That they tried everything, and never could they knock you out. I know I am doomed, beast, and that tomorrow at this hour I'll be dead already, but will you satisfy my curiosity? Is it possible to kill you?'

Still chewing on an old lady's thigh bone, the Manjaleo took his time to answer. 'I suppose I could tell you, since it will be your bones I'll be chewing on at tea,' he said. 'It was your foolish curiosity, after all, which set me free, so I owe you an explanation. See, foolish girl, many a man think me impossible to kill; that is an ignorant assumption. In this world, nothing lives forever and we are all susceptible to perishing. I will one day

die just like everyone dies. But it is a fact nature intended to reward my survival skills by making me almost invincible.'

'Almost?' the girl asked. The Manjaleo was introspective. The boy was under the impression he was grateful to have someone with whom to share his loneliness. Yes, in spite of everything, the Manjaleo beast, too, was human."

"No, he wasn't," My dad corrected me.

"Shut up."

"All he ever wanted was a friend."

"Shut up, dad! You're ruining it!"

"'All men are fools to hit me with blades and arrows, for my death lies somewhere other than my body,' the Manjaleo said. 'Deep in the ocean, there is a chest: inside this chest there is a box. Inside the box there is a clock and inside the clock there is a stone and inside the stone there is a dove. Kill the dove, and in it you will find a candle: that candle bears the flame of my life. Once the flame is extinct, so am I, for there can only be one Manjaleo on earth at a time."

Clearly, this is the most idiotic thing in this entire story. While the notion of death as something outside of the body is not only strategically understandable but part of our symbolical tradition, the idea of keeping a flame by throwing it at the bottom of the ocean is illogical in itself. What's more, how is it inside a living dove? Does the dove suffer from chronic heartburn? And how does it live inside a stone? Stones are never hollow. The only symbol slightly verisimilar to the practicality of the situation is the clock, which doubtlessly would stop working with all these things stuck inside jamming its mechanisms and granting the Manjaleo more time. Once his time is finally here, out of the clock will come a bird like a cuckoo announcing time of death, and the clock will start working again. As for the amount of oxygen available in the chest necessary to keep a dove alive and cause continuous combustion, one can only be expected to experience a sudden lapse of scientific knowledge for the sake of good storytelling (just as, later at school, children are taught to sacrifice the latter in benefit of the first).

"Aware now of the Manjaleo's vulnerabilities, the boy made his way back into the ocean and requested an audience with his brother-in-law, the King of Fish. His majesty was astonished to be informed of an alien object's unauthorized presence in his territory, and declared a state of emergency until the chest was located. Once they found it, the boy thanked his majesty the Fish, and brought the chest back to dry land. With his master key, he had no difficulty opening it. Faraway in his cave, the Manjaleo felt a pinch of nausea.

The box was opened, which caused him slight unbalance. The clock began to tell time again, and the Manjaleo's heart started pounding in the rhythm of tick-tacking.

The stone was a little more difficult to crack open. The boy summoned a nearby flock of sheep, who had very clear orders from the king to always help members of the royal family in trouble. With their hooves, they broke the hollow stone, and a dove flew away, finally free. Desperate, the boy called for the help of the pigeon king in capturing it, and eventually the dove was found and returned to the boy."

"Was it hard for him to kill the bird?" I asked.

"Sure it was. But he had to do it."

"He could've asked someone else."

"Would that make a difference?"

"Definitely."

"Fine, he asked someone else. He saw a violent, bird-hating man passing by and asked him to do it. This man killed the bird and screamed when he saw a candle materialise in his hands. He ran screaming witchcraft, witchcraft."

"With the candle?"

"He dropped the candle. The boy picked it from the ground and blew it. The Manjaleo exploded in his cave just as the clock hit 1pm."

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Thus ends the story of the Manjaleo, in a completely anti-climactic, faraway death. To say he didn't know what hit him would be false, considering the small range of options, but he probably had little time to lament his bad luck. The boy rescued the princess from the cave and many a fur coat was made from the Manjaleo. By the end of the story my father was always much more tired than I was, and sometimes he fell asleep right then and there; sometimes he fell asleep in the middle of the story. Sometimes he forgot how to tell it right or to make the proper character voices, and the story was ruined just like that. Often, I corrected him, and once I narrated it as he fell asleep.

Children have a different sense of belonging. They feel as if the world belongs to them and they belong to the world, and all this happens before they become terribly small and all-knowing of their ignorance as teenagers. Childhood may only exist to make us feel bad about the other portions of life, when it really does end always the same way, with the realization that the story of your life was a completely different one from the one you'd been telling yourself all this time.

I made my father promise me he would never tell this story to anyone else, for that

story was mine and for no one to change. But people, like stories, change, and they keep telling themselves the same story over and over until it looks pretty and they are the heroes.

Maybe not all of us are number three. Not all of us are going to build brick houses and wait till we get to the water. Maybe we're not brave or daring, and maybe we are entitled and have bad taste in music. All those knights and gentlemen in these old stories would not be all that either, were they to live in our land. Everything which used to exist has ceased to exist now that science has proven it impossible. The minute the scientific process declared fairies non-existent, they all collapsed and turned into flowers, flowers that weren't roses. A baby Manjaleo, however, revelling in anonymity, was allowed to stay in a scientific lapse of judgement. The Manjaleo, after all, is multiple animals in one, a nothing stuck inside an everything, and like my father said, very lonely. He is condemned to hiding forever in order to avoid extinction by scientific improbability. In order to escape death, he must never live in the first place; only in fiction is his kind allowed. Somewhere in the ocean, though, there is a chest where there is a box, inside which is a clock, and a stone, and a dove, and a candle.

Parents tend to leave us secrets and monsters and watermelons that are hollow because, in the end, they want to tell us the truth but can't do it to our faces. To us they are nothing but parents, and they can't afford to be looked at as fallible people. Except when they fail, of course, then they will not care to be seen as parents. Whatever we inherit from them, the weights we accept or deny, their stories and their flaws are not theirs but ours: we must begin again, we must reclaim our stories.

LAND OF GREAT FORGETTING

Karen Quevillon

I've been a keen gardener since childhood. While other teens were exploring herbs, I was exploring herbs. I spent many fond hours propped up on the couch, perusing entries in Rodale's Encyclopedia of Herbs. Outdoors, I made it my mission to prune every overgrown shrub in our yard. I experimented with teas made from wildflowers.

When it came to mealtime, though, I didn't make the connection between growing and eating, and in this I think I was entirely ordinary. What most of us put on our plates comes cut and portioned from a sanitized grocery store shelf. In fact, it's often also premade and pre-cooked and doesn't resemble a living being. No blood, guts, rot, dirt, manure, worms, flies, holes, root fibres, or extraneous anything.

I never made an association between my vegetable consumption and my gardening, until I had children of my own to follow me into the garden. I knew they would enjoy growing carrots more than dahlias. Toddlers don't care about curb appeal; they want to accomplish something. Mine were wondering what dirt was made of, and why we couldn't grow an ice cream tree. Exploring the connection between nature and dinner table would be a pleasantly mind-blowing experience for them, I thought smugly.

Our family had a backyard that was new to us, though the weeds had obviously lived there for generations. I hacked my way through, summer after summer, rescuing raspberry canes in one corner and uncovering garlic and chives and a sprawling rhubarb plant. From garden store packets we planted beans and beets, arugula, strawberries, carrots, cucumber, a pumpkin and tomatoes. It was a struggle. The best growing patch—in full sun at the back of the lot—was out of sight and out of mind, and the soil remained poor and infested with crabgrass and meadow weeds. I can't say I was much more diligent than my five-year old in tending this little garden. Our lives were elsewhere, full and busy. Our plants languished.

Even so, what harvest the squirrels and rabbits and weird beetle-thingies left to us, we rejoiced in. Chives became an essential topping, even for porridge. In July, a daily hunt began for strawberries and raspberries, picked and eaten in the same motion. Over the course of a summer, our cucumber vine grew a single, four-inch cuke. When harvest day came we sat down, passed around plates, and I sliced the prickly green veggie as solemnly as if it were a birthday cake; the children would have told you it tasted just as good.

Luckily, I had friends with superior vegetable gardens. One of them had just moved from downtown Toronto to the back of beyond, abandoning her job of many years at a bond rating agency to start an organic farm. Brenda came back into my life by way of my kitchen. We subscribed for a food share from her Black Sheep Farm, and soon we were receiving kilos upon kilos of swiss chard and zucchinis and musk melon on a bi-weekly

basis. Because Brenda was Brenda, she also grew unusual things like golden beets, ground cherries and purple carrots. We visited her farm once or twice, met her free-ranging chickens and toured her organic vegetable patch, which I was gratified to note had just as many weeds as mine. Brenda and I agreed there was nothing like growing your own vegetables to put a value on nourishment. She said it worked the same way for meat: personally killing, plucking and quartering a chicken helped you to truly appreciate your plate of coq au vin.

No doubt some people thought Brenda was crazy to give up her condo and lucrative salary for vegetables. Not I. Vegetables are intriguing, damnit, and important! Indeed, all around us the cultural kitchen tables were turning. The organic food movement, slow food advocates and raw food activists were speaking up and being heard. "Plant-based eating," as Michael Pollan called it, had arrived on center stage. It turned out that homegrown vegetables were not just tastier, they might be the solution to a number of modern problems. Not the least of which was figuring out what to cook my family for dinner.

According to Michael Pollan, "North American food culture is so debauched that much of what we buy to eat doesn't even qualify as food[i]." Profit maximization dictates that the corporate food industry work to make edible products that resist infestation, last longer on store shelves, ripen artificially, grow to mega size, and smell deceptively fresh and "homestyle." When "natural flavour" refers to a lab chemical and crop yields come from genetically modified stock, you know you're a long way from nature.

This is where the humble vegetable gets crazy beautiful. It turns out that vegetables are way more than the sum of their chemical components. Remember broccoli? First they said it prevented cancer, then they said it caused it. Don't blame broccoli, blame reductive food science: that is, the attempt to extract from the brassica family a single beneficial nutrient, namely beta-carotene. When beta-carotene is ingested on its own in a supplement, it may actually increase the risk of disease. Why? It seems that in order for our bodies to benefit from the anti-oxidants in fresh produce, these anti-oxidants need to work in conjunction with . . . well, who really knows? It could be the other chemicals present, or the fibre, perhaps the vitamins, even the oils. There's simply nothing like a real vegetable.

Chemical analysis of a leaf of garden-variety thyme reveals forty-five different antioxidants, and we have no idea how they interact inside our bodies during the digestion process. In fact, as per recent insights from intestinal ecology, digestion itself is likely way more complex than the mere breaking-down of chemicals [ii]. Cocktail party fact: there are roughly as many neurons in the human digestive tract as in the spinal column. The moral of the story? Eat your greens. The actual plants.

However fascinating at the cellular level, constant vegetable-eating might get boring if there weren't tens of thousands of tasty, good-looking plants to choose from. Yes, you read correctly. Tens of thousands, not the typical smattering at one end of the supermarket. The truth is, there isn't just "broccoli" as we commonly refer to it, that dark-green miniature

tree. Instead there are broccolis by the dozen: petite and towering ones, coloured green and purple-brown and whorled in creamy white, some that don't even grow to a head, but whose stalks are the delicacy. They have funky names like Spigiarello and Piracicaba, and equally funky histories.

Likewise, there are thousands of kinds of lettuces, each with distinctive flavours, and hundreds of potato and eggplant and bean varieties, to mention but a few species. And as for tomatoes, at least ten thousand kinds could be growing in my garden. Here, in crazy beautiful vegetable land, there are other things you've never dreamed of: land seaweed, melons the size of olives, something called a rat-tail radish, wonderberries, music garlic, the "five minute" plant, pink-striped green beans that grow eight inches long, and a tomato they call Mr. Keeper, which will store for months without rotting, out on your kitchen counter.

To get an inkling of the diversity of vegetable life on our planet, Google "heirloom seeds." Heirloom refers to any cultivar that has been propagated by seed for over fifty years. In other words, these are plants that have escaped the relentless, homogenizing imperative of modern agriculture. By ordinary standards, many are downright odd. That's the problem with ordinary standards. Take the ancient Peruvian blue potato, which can still be grown from heirloom seed. It is the size of a golfball, and when you slice it open, its ringed flesh looks as if somebody tie-dyed it a brilliant blue. The Incas grew potatoes in reds, pinks, yellows and oranges, sweet and bitter, water-loving and drought-tolerant, and Peruvian farmers and cooks have sustained that diversity into present day. Almost four thousand varieties of potatoes exist there of all shapes, sizes and flavors, remaining a staple of the nation's cuisine.

Whether or not you enjoy gardening, consider the sheer scale of this edible plant diversity—what you could be enjoying compared to what you're currently being sold. Personally, I have misgivings about leaving the future of vegetables in the hands of Big Ag and the purveyors of bland, white food substances with flavor and color enhancements. The time had come to ask, not what the humble vegetable had done for me, but what could I do for the humble vegetable?

Spread its seeds, was one good suggestion. I attended a talk at my local library to learn about "saving seeds" and, fifty color slides later, I was hooked on heirlooms. In the dead of winter, I drove my young kids to a Seedy Saturday exchange in Niagara Falls, bribing them with the promise of doughnuts. Seedy Saturdays are grassroots seed exchanges and seed sales of open pollinated crops; they sprout up all over the country during the winter. This one was being held in the small gymnasium of a neighbourhood church. The three of us struggled in out of the cold, stomping snow from our boots, unsure what to expect.

The idea of a seed exchange, as its name suggests, is to exchange the seed you've saved from your own plants during the growing season for the seeds of others. We were such newbies we didn't bring seeds to swap. At the entrance, for a fifty-cent donation, we were

encouraged to choose a small baggie of seeds, donated for the unprepared folks like us. Then we toured the room, seeing what others had to offer.

I was beginning to get a grasp on the novel idea that seeds could be collected from plants. Take for instance the dragon tongue bean, whose mottled pink-and-brown seeds I took home from my first Seedy Saturday. The gardener who gave them to me said she'd simply let the last growth of her bean plants dry out on their stalks. Then she picked, shelled, and shared. Who knew you could do this, instead of buying a packet labeled "beans" from the garden store each spring? Actually, you can't, not with most of today's monocrop cultivars.

These plants produce seeds that are completely infertile, and the companies that sell these plants have designed them this way. Don't bother planting the seeds you've scooped from a conventional grocery store melon, for example. You'll get nowhere. By contrast, the heirloom varieties of fruits and veggies exchanged at Seedy Saturdays are what is called open-pollinated: they will develop fertile seeds with the help of natural pollinators like bees. Relying on open pollination—also known as Nature—means it is possible to survive without having to buy things. Seed-saving and seed-sharing are political acts worthy of an Adbusters campaign. If you doubt it, consider the struggles of activist Vandana Shiva, who has been fighting Monsanto for decades over the right of subsistence farmers in India to sow the native seeds they collect from their own crops. Monsanto wants the farmers to have to buy their genetically modified seed, plus the chemicals and fertilizers needed to keep the resulting mono-crops alive.

Many other seed-savers recognize their gardening as a progressive social act. On their website, Seed Savers Exchange, the foremost American organization for the exchange of heirloom seed varieties, states that "the future of our planet depends on a genetically diverse food supply" and "recognizes that the strategies and tactics being employed by the agricultural biotechnology industry are diametrically opposed to our efforts to protect our garden heritage" and "grow healthy food for our families." Likewise, in her humorous memoir *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Barbara Kingsolver documents the ecopolitical importance and the practical difficulty of growing and eating local. My family was nowhere near able to survive on our vegetable patch, but it was a revelation for me to think of gardening as way of sustaining biodiversity. Not only were they healthy and surprisingly diverse, vegetables could be politically radical, right down to their roots. At the Niagara Seedy Saturday, after hours spent carefully inspecting all the seedy wares, my children declined to trade their door-prize packets; they'd become quickly attached to the promise of white icicle radishes and purple beauty peppers.

There was still three months of winter to go. So, mimicking any serious gardener, I sought out seed catalogues and cultivated my imagination instead. Nowadays heirloom seeds are a click away. Page after page of glossy, glistening veggies can turn temptation into obsession, but you can always justify your window shopping by its educational content.

Fruits and vegetables have histories, indeed. It's just that when they were turned into commodities, we started thinking of them more like edible objects. (In vegetable lore, the post-WWII era could be called The Great Forgetting.)

It is difficult to convey the scale of the historical lore and practical wisdom available to seed enthusiasts. Take the Yugoslavian finger fruit, alias pineapple squash, which has a singular geneology to match its singular morphology. Believed to be from Chile originally, "James J. H. Gregory introduced this variety in 1884," one website entry recorded. Ivorycolored, with distinctive "wings" along its body, "this squash can be eaten as a summer squash when young or left to mature to be an interesting conversation piece." Another pedigreed variety, the White Scallop squash, had been illustrated by a famous French botanist and cultivated by Thomas Jefferson. Paying \$3 or \$4 for a packet of open-pollinated seeds to start our own branch of this veggie genealogy seemed like an incredible bargain.

The following spring, my children planted their icicle radishes and purple pepper seeds, along with a garden full of other open pollinated varieties; some we started indoors, and transplanted as the weather warmed. We seeded, we watered, we weeded, and they grew. For children and adults alike, those first leaflets are always a little miraculous. Much later, slugs were to infest our Merveille de Quatre Saisons lettuce and a free-loading chipmunk dug himself a burrow right under the sprawl of yellow pear tomatoes, but for the most part our new garden was a resounding and abundant success. We had planted a good deal of seeds and seedlings, true, but each plant seemed to me incredibly fertile. To any house guests I happened to immediately direct toward our lush vegetable patch I apologized, tongue in cheek, for the jungle our backyard had become. After all, who really needed to distinguish one sprawling vine from another? Just pick and enjoy, for you have arrived in crazy vegetable land.

And, oh, this was a delicious realm. In our lives and in our bowls we had poetry in produce. There is nothing like the burst of flavor when you pop a fresh-picked cherry tomato in your mouth. To say you are tasting sunlight is perhaps the best approximation. My little ones gave me daily updates as to how many fruits on each of our varieties were coming ripe. Potatoes were a special joy to all of us. I'd never grown them, and so I'd never tasted them fresh. Turns out a true potato is dense but moist, like a pear, not hard and dry. Potatoes were fun to harvest too; we wiggled our hands into the earth until our fingers found knobby treasures of different shapes and sizes. The green we call arugula and the English call rocket—a plant that resembles a roadside weed—turned out to be my personal favorite. All spring and summer I picked it in fragrant handfuls to add to our salads and it never failed to surprise my taste buds with its verdant, peppery personality.

I saved my arugula's seed. I let the last shoots of the summer grow tall and spindly and cap themselves in tiny white flowers. (Did I mention vegetable gardening is an exercise in patience?) Finally the flowers turned to seedpods, magically it seemed to me, and then I

waited some more until the pods dried upon the withering stalks. Arugula seeds are the same size and colour as poppy seeds. Carefully, I split each miniature bean-shaped pod at its seam and gently scraped the contents into a Ziploc bag, feeling as I imagine all wizards do—slightly foolish, but mostly powerful. I was working in humble service of a vegetable lineage; my family's future looked exceptionally tasty and healthy.

- [i] Pollan, Michael. In Defense of Food: an Eater's Manifesto. New York: Penguin Books, 2008.
- [ii] The Economist, August 2012.

IMAGINAÇÕES

WINGS AND SAND

SEAN PATRICK WHITELEY

Together, her feet brushed on and through the sand. We walked along the beach, didn't hold each other's hands, we weren't there yet, still getting to know one another. She wondered, where does the water go?

"Over. Out. Past Nahant," I said.

"Have you been there?"

"Over? No. Out. Yes, I've been out."

"And, Nahant? Have you been?"

"Mm'yes. I've been there, also."

"I'd like to go there."

"Now?"

"Not now. But, next time, maybe."

"We can do that."

"I'd like to be over the bay."

"With some wings, you could be."

She stopped walking and dropped to a knee in the sand, holding out her palm.

"This will only take a moment," she said.

She undid her blouse, tossed it to the side. From behind her, wings, transparent, insectile, bloomed. They grew and extended from her back. She stood, a vision, as if born of dragonflies.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I should have told you—"

"—about the wings. Perhaps."

"Yes. I feel like I can't breathe when they're tucked away."

"And . . . now?"

"You seem to know . . . and understand." She kicked from the ground. Her wings, silent in their flight, took her away. Into the sky, over the water. Out, and past Nahant Sound, this girl, clothed only in black pants, black bra.

I watched her become smaller, farther. She waved back to me, I think, I believe, I hope I will see her, again. Dreading and yearning. My eyes lost her in the sky. Or the sky swallowed her. I continued on, walking along the beach alone. My feet sifted through the sand, and I wished to have wings, as well.

THE ONLY LONELY ROAD

JESSICA LEE RICHARDSON

Slow and with rage Paradise devoured its only road.

Paradise said, "There." Paradise needed a change of identity. Was tired of being such a dream. With no road out, a paradise was not paradise anymore, was it?

Utopia and Mirage said she should have just gotten a haircut. A piercing maybe? But Paradise wanted to change the chisel of her lowest rock.

Over the years many wanderers came but did not went. They could not go, and Paradise loved the feeling of their pounding little walking sticks. Their shouts. Their buried maps. The way wanderers would have no choice but to set up camp and live in her until they died.

Over the years some lure grew in the guts of this wonder of a world, as lure is sure to do.

Some said the sums were off. Not all who had wandered in could be counted.

Some said the way out was up, and fictitious wingbearers abounded.

Some just said one, Wickham, Wickham, they said, went. Wickham, Wickham,

Wickham, they chanted like wishes into the canyons of Paradise.

"Where is this fictitious wingbearer, Wickham?" Paradise, pleased as marmalade, implored. Utopia and Mirage just kept their mouths closed. Not a peep.

Paradise looked from universe to universe and shrugged. There are just too many variables, too many isn'ts. Such an is as a wingbearer is—"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, he's right there," Utopia said. Her face was red from holding it. "He's humming into the dirt below the stump there."

"What dirt? What stump?" Paradise searched herself. "Stop pulling my leg, Utopia." She curled the edges of her starscape away from her friend.

"Oh god, don't start causing black holes again. My stump, by my southernmost river in the Glen of Indivision."

Paradise caught her breath. "Your stump? Your stump!" "Take a chill," said Mirage in a glisten.

"He's busy humming himself whole because he nearly lost himself in you." Utopia

said.

"That's the point," Paradise shouted. She was shaking with rage.

Earthquakes sprouted and volcanoes spewed.

All kinds of new lure was born in Paradise when she lost the wingbearer to Utopia, who then lost him to Heaven. For Wickham's part he was unaware. He took singing lessons from birds and enjoyed the changes of lighting in his many incarnations.

Finally he lived a life that took him back to Paradise. She was an old hag now, wearied from waiting, but still miraculous in her crevasses.

The storytellers had been waiting too.

Everyone wanted the wingbearer, everyone wanted his wings. Everyone wanted a way into another view, up they chanted, up.

Paradise wept sometimes at this. "I don't understand. I've given them everything!" She railed.

"Except a way out." Utopia muttered.

Paradise tried to thwart the wingbearer's flight in a variety of ways. First she singed his wings, but the storytellers had ointments.

Then she wet them. But the storytellers fluffed.

Next, she pinned them under a large rock. The storytellers rolled it off. The storytellers, you see, wanted to form a chain behind the wingbearer, each holding onto each, so they might ride out of here in the hero's wake.

"I'm not a hero, though," Wickham sang. Everything was a song with him.

He constantly had headphones on and barely listened to the rest of the world.

In his early flights he let the storytellers hang on, but all their talking was a real bummer for the wingbearer. He began searching for hiding spots, where he could just jam out alone.

One day after the lurers lured him into a chase again and he was tired and bored enough to talk out loud to himself, he said, "I wish I could just have some peace!"

Suddenly below him there was a stirring of dirt and sand.

To the wingbearers great surprise the sand spoke back to him. "Embody me," the sand said.

Strange as it was, the wingbearer thought the ground had an alright idea, actually, hearing the footsteps of the storytellers in the hills. He began covering himself with dirt.

The storytellers ran right by him.

"Thanks, Sand," the wingbearer said, silt licked and sitting up. "Embody me," it said again.

I guess it only knows two words, thought the wingbearer. Still, pretty good for sand.

The wingbearer tried to embody sand since the sand just kept asking nicely.

He dug deeper. And deeper. He sweat and sang and dug again.

Eventually he was successful and the sand swallowed him right up.

He had a choice then, to continue on as the wingbearer, or to stay where he was as sand. "I'll just stay here," he decided. "It's quiet." He settled into his hard particulate. "Everyone needs a change of identity sometimes," he thought, thinking his thoughts were his own, but of course now he was just a part of Paradise.

She smiled at full glow to her friends, who sighed. Mirage looked down at her fingernails. Utopia pretended interest in her phone.

Paradise won the other realms back eventually, though, by reading them all of the wonderful stories her people wrote down through the ages about their terrible, terrible loss, and about their dreams of glory and escape.

EVEN AND ODD

Daniel Belanger

In the beginning there was the number, and the number was odd, even as it divided a third of itself into unequal parts of darkness and light, an act that future theologians would refer to as the Wholly Split. At first, there was mostly darkness with just a pin prick of light, but the light streamed continuously out into the darkness. The darkness and the light formed the day. Odd divided the day into seven, and she was so pleased that she decided to fill them with a number of things, which, added together, became the world.

On the first day, she made the sea and all the creatures to live in it. On the second day, she made the land, which later would be bought and sold. This is how Monday became the start of the work week. There were a lot of angles who felt that Odd never should have made the land.

"That was when the trouble started," Isosceles liked to point out.

Others felt that she shouldn't have divided the day.

"Monday is an abomination," Right said. "She should have stuck with Sunday. Sunday should have been enough."

There was, however, no turning back. On Tuesday, Odd made the insects to crawl on the land. On Wednesday, she made the animals to give the insects something to eat. On Thursday, she made birds, and on Friday, she created the sky to give them a place to fly. On Saturday, she created woman to tend the world, keeping it safe, clean and beautiful. That afternoon, Odd created a lovely garden for the woman to live in, which she called the Garden of Even because she knew how hard it was to be odd.

"This is cool," the woman, whose name was Ada, thought, "but who can I share it with?"

So that afternoon, she tamed one of Odd's creatures and took it as a pet. She named her pet Cat and showed it around. But Cat ran off, So she tamed Dog, who was much friendlier than Cat, but didn't seem to understand a word that Ada said.

"What's going on, Dog?" she'd ask, and Dog would just sit there with his tongue hanging out, so Ada went to Odd and requested a mate.

While Ada was sleeping, Odd, who wanted her to be happy, took a mole from Ada's ass and created man.

"Who are you?" Ada asked when she woke up to find a man sleeping beside her.

"I'm Evan," the man replied.

"I don't remember giving you permission to sleep with me, Evan," said Ada. "Ask next time."

"Okay," said bleary-eyed Evan, obedient as a puppy.

"How are you two getting on," asked Odd, as she dropped in through the clouds she'd recently created.

"It's all good," Evan said, not wanting to make waves since that, he figured, was Odd's job.

"We'll see," said Ada.

"Well, I made most of this for you, so I hope you enjoy," said Odd. "Just one favor. Stay away from the orange tree that grows in the middle of the garden. That I made for my daughter, Janice."

"Okay, we won't touch it," Ada said, hoping that Odd would leave so that she could go back to sleep.

"You have a daughter?" Evan, as amorous as Odd made him, asked, "How old is she? Can I meet her?"

"She hasn't been born yet," said Odd.

"Too young," Evan snickered.

"But when she is born," Odd said, ignoring Evan's icky remark, "she'll shine so strong that the sexist Roman citizenry of the day will call her the Sun of Man. I'll want her to have the orange tree because the potassium in its fruit will keep her bright and alert. She'll have a big job to do so she'll have to stay on her toes."

"Well, that doesn't make much sense," said Evan, "but okay, I guess. We won't go near your precious potassium tree."

"Please don't," said Odd, before returning to the skies where she was lunching that afternoon with Isosceles, Right and Trisha, her three favorite angles.

After Odd left, Ada went back to sleep. Evan, who wasn't tired, went for a walk.

No matter which direction he walked, he ended up at the orange tree where he tripped over a strange creature crouching in the surrounding grasses.

"Who are you?" he asked Odd's animal.

"I'm Steve," it said, "the mongoose."

"Well, what are you doing here, Steve?" Evan asked.

"I'm trying to get an orange," Steve said.

"But Odd said we're not to eat them," said Evan. "Did you not get the message?"

"I got it," Steve said glibly, "but I'll tell you something. I was sleeping under the tree this morning when one of them fell right on my head. I was so mad that I bit it. And you know what? It was delicious!"

"Ya?" said Evan, his curiosity piqued. "And you didn't get in trouble?"

"Trouble! No!" Steve exclaimed with a defiant little laugh. "Odd is such a goodygoody. What's she going to do?"

"Maybe you're right," Evan said, his mouth watering as he tried to imagine what orange tasted like.

"Of course I am," said Steve. "Now do me a favor. You're nice and tall on those two long legs of yours. Reach up and grab me an orange. Grab yourself one, too. They're so good!"

Evan picked two oranges. He gave one to Steve who devoured it whole. Evan tried biting into his orange but found the skin hard, so he peeled it back. He bit it again, and this time the sweet juice spurted out into his mouth. He wolfed down the rest of the delectable fruit, then picked another for later. Feeling completely satisfied, he headed back to go to sleep beside Ada.

"Oh, and buddy," Steve said as Evan was walking away, "do us both a favor and don't tell the woman you ate an orange. If she finds out how delicious they are, she'll want some. That'll mean less for us."

"I won't say anything," Evan said, but in truth he couldn't wait to tell Ada. It was the first time that he told a lie, and it felt really good.

As he walked through the garden, he suddenly noticed that he was completely naked.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed looking down at his hairy body. "Am I ever ugly!"

He grabbed some leaves from the trees as he walked and wrapped them around his midsection. When he got back to Ada he saw that she was naked too. But he didn't think that she looked bad at all like that.

Maybe I won't tell her about the oranges, he thought.

"What have you got there?" Ada asked when she saw Evan holding the orange out in front of him with both hands as he walked.

"Nothing," Evan replied, trying to act nonchalant.

"What do you mean, nothing?" Ada barked, annoyed with Evan's disingenuous answer. "I can see you've got an orange. Odd said they weren't for us, so why are you messing with them?"

"Sorry, Ada," Evan sighed, "but they're delicious. You've got to try one."

Ada was reluctant at first, but when Evan peeled the fruit, it's sweet, tangy fragrance enticed her. She tried it and as soon as she did, she realized that she was naked.

"Hey!" she cried, "did you know I was naked?"

"I only just noticed," Evan replied honestly.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Ada snapped.

"I didn't get a chance," Evan said sheepishly.

"Ya, I bet," said Ada, shaking her head as she grabbed a bunch of leaves and wrapped them around her body.

Just then Odd floated down from the sky looking like an angry bee.

"I thought I told you two not to eat the oranges!" she admonished. "Now I've got to kick you out of the Garden of Even."

She picked up a corner of the garden, tipping it over on its side. Ada and Evan went tumbling into the wilderness where, away from Odd's watchful eye, they felt free to play without worrying about consequences. They soon discovered sex, and, after much ado, intercourse. It wasn't long, then, before Ada got pregnant and gave birth to Kate and Mabel. The twins grew up rapidly.

While at twenty-two they were both attractive, Kate was envious of Mabel, who had beautifully long and flowing honey-colored hair. Kate's hair was nice too. It was long, blonde and shiny. But there was no flow to it; She had always wanted her hair to flow, but it just didn't.

"Don't worry about it," said Steve, the mongoose, who also got kicked out of paradise, though not before stealing a few precious seeds. "Have a nice glass of orange juice. Everything is going to be okay."

**

Janice Thrice sat in the desert waiting for Odd to show herself. She had been here for three days and three nights, and wanted to feel herself filled with the Wholly Split of darkness and light. But these fractions of Odd, formed from the features of Odd's Whole

Number when, in the beginning, she divided herself to create the world, eluded Janice, who felt all gray inside.

"I don't feel Odd at all," she said to herself with a sigh.

It was then that she spotted a mongoose scampering towards her in the blaring desert sunlight.

"Hi, I'm Steve," the mongoose said, blinking his dark, ovular eyes. "How about a nice glass of orange juice?"

An orange tree suddenly sprang up, as if from the seed of Steve's words, right there in the sand just a few feet outside of the sacred triangle that Janice had drawn around herself with an index finger.

"Something's not right here," she immediately thought. "The universe doesn't spring from words! It's numeric in nature."

As she stared at the tree, thinking about its mathematical improbability, the oranges on its branches turned red.

"These are blood oranges," Janice cried. "This isn't Odd's tree!"

"You're right," Steve admitted, "but they're delicious anyway. You should try one."

I don't think so, Steve," Janice replied. "And I'm not so sure you're a mongoose either, by the way."

"How's that?" asked Steve, looking confused.

"You remind me of this angle I once knew who turned away from Odd when Odd made Monday," said Janice. "What was her name? It wasn't Right. Right had issues with Monday, too, since it led to the awful invention of work. But Right trusted in Odd, so she forgave her, and stayed in Even. This one angle, though, felt that the making of Monday was inexcusable. So she decided to create her own realm outside of Even. After convincing three other angles to go with her, she divided herself from Odd's wholly number, and created Null."

Just then Janice saw a crooked line unravelling itself from Steve's right ear. It rose up above him, splitting itself into four.

"Wrecked Angle!" Janice blurted, as the renegade angle's name finally came to her. "It is you, isn't it?"

"It's me, "The Unwholly Split' as those other sly little angles used to call me," Wrecked Angle admitted.

"You were trying to trick me, weren't you?"

"I'm trying to educate you," Wrecked replied. "One day you'll see that four angles are wiser than three. The concept of work, for example, is the ill-conceived product of the three: the Number, the Sum and the Wholly Split. An Odd job indeed. It's not the four way, four play all day. We do all kinds of fun stuff. One time we pixelated Steve and made him bring Evan the forbidden orange. You should have seen Evan's face when, after taking a bite, he realized that he was naked! Odd was so angry that she banished Ada and Evan and all of their descendants from the Garden of Even. What a sourpuss! There's no play in her. Don't you want to step out of your triangle and have a little fun? Come on, Janice! Come out and play!"

"I'm not here to play," Janice replied sternly. "I've got a job to do."

"As you wish," Wrecked replied as she suddenly squared off, disappearing into the atmosphere.

"What?" said Steve, as shocked at awakening to find himself out in the middle of the desert as he was with his sudden, inexplicable ability to speak. "The last thing I remember, I was chasing a water rat through the reeds along the edge of the Nile."

"Well, nothing is mathematically impossible when you believe in Odd," said Janice, pulling a calculator out of a pocket in her toga and figuring an equation to send Steve zooming through space back to the Nile. "Maybe I can get you home in time for dinner." She tapped away until Steve disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Now Janice was alone. The sun sizzled hotter than she'd ever felt it before.

"At least it's a dry heat," Janice, ever the optimist, thought.

The sun, after a while, began to angle down low, causing the blue sky to lose some of its dazzle. Clouds that had gathered on the horizon suddenly blossomed into a garden of radiant pink, red and purple blooms, instantly igniting, within Janice, a spark of hope.

"The Garden of Even," Janice said to herself in awe, "... so it hasn't been lost."

As the sun sank over the horizon, the evening began, and Janice was filled with the Wholly Split. In that instant, she felt in her heart what she had always known in her mind. The darkness and light coming together in a whole number that completed the world, and matched the perfect incongruity of Odd's uneven face. A problem entered Janice's head as she thought about the oddity of it all.

"There are sixty seconds in every minute," the problem said, "but how many firsts?"

It occurred to Janice that she'd been living the answer to this question her whole life.

"Every new second is an elimination of the last," she thought, "making it a first. Time is a countdown that began when Ada and Evan were thrown out of the Garden of Even. The only way to stop it is for me, the only offspring of Odd's eternal number, to be the first and the last Odd child to let herself be subtracted from the sum of humanity, and so go down for the count."

Stepping beyond the boundaries of her sacred triangle, Janice began walking slowly out of the desert and back down into the crowded streets of Jerusalem.

LEAVING AJAWAN

JORDAN BOLAY

It was an autumn day in Prince Albert National Park. The man known to most only as Grey Owl sat on a bench near the fireplace in the Waskesiu beer parlour. He pushed away his whiskey and stood slowly, leaning against the familiar table for stability.

"Going somewhere?" asked Mingan, the innkeeper. He was the only other soul in the building, the disappeared crowds marking the end of another season of pilgrimages to Beaver Lodge.

"I need to get back to Ajawan," said Grey Owl. "I need to check up on Jelly Roll and Rawhide, make sure they're set for winter before I leave for that damned tour, and Yvonne too."

"You need to take care of yourself, Wa-sha-quon-asin," Mingan replied.

"You need to take care of yourself." That's what Anahareo had always said to him, and he had once famously replied: "I must take care of those who cannot care for themselves and are not cared for by others, those who have broken the rules of all the furtive fold and are now hunted," though not to her. *But where is she now?* he wondered. *Where is my Sajo?*

"Wa-sha-quon-asin?"

"I need my paddle," said Grey Owl.

"You need rest."

"Do you know how many times I have paddled Waskesiu, Namêkosis, and the Lake-Where-the-Hearts-Were-Hung in rain and wind?"

"And do you know how many men have been sent to the bottomlessness of those lakes?"

Grey Owl frowned, the scar above his right eyebrow creasing heavily.

"Morning then," he said.

"Morning," Mingan replied.

And Grey Owl, half-skunked, lay his head on the bar.

He awoke early the next morning, retrieved his long oar from Mingan, and went to the docks. He climbed into his birchbark canoe and began to paddle while standing—as the Ojibwe had taught him—across Waskesiu Lake, named after the Red Deer. He wove through the Narrows, portaged the Kingsmere River, and put in at the South End warden

station, where he collected a bottle of whiskey for his cabin. At the river's mouth, he found Jelly Roll and Rawhide, his famous beaver friends. Jelly Roll, the subject of several films and named after his favorite treat, was loved by all. Rawhide was another story; the mother of Jelly Roll's kits and the matriarch of Beaver Lodge, named because she was still 'naked' when Grey Owl and Anahareo adopted her, did not enjoy the same public attention as her mate.

The Beavers climbed into the canoe. "Hello friends," smiled Grey Owl.

"Hello," Rawhide replied with the voice of a young woman.

"Anahareo?"

"Why did you leave us, Shapian?"

"Chilawee? Chikanee?" he paused. "Sajo?"

"Why do you think you are Meegwon? Why do you leave us alone in the woods and travel to the villages like Meegwon when you know you are Shapian?"

Grey Owl stood frozen in his canoe. He knew why he had left, why he would leave again. Just as he knew why he had traded the isolation of Beaver Lodge for the company of seasonal pilgrims. But he could not tell Sajo why he was no longer her Shapian, just as he had not been able to tell Anahareo why he was no longer Wa-sha-quon-asin, even though, more than ever now, people the world over called him Grey Owl.

"I'm sorry," he said. Only a distant loon replied.

Grey Owl continued to paddle up the east coast of Kingsmere Lake, standing in his birchbark canoe, his Beavers resting on the bow.

His hard eyes scanned the horizon and he wondered, where is my Sajo?

*

It was a spring afternoon, or at least it was supposed to be. Winter had persisted well into April. The man known to most only as Grey Owl wondered whether that winter would ever end or whether his Beavers would be trapped in their lodge, under snow and ice, forever. He would never know the answer. He was returning from his final tour. He had lectured about the Beaver People and the Pilgrims' responsibilities to preserve nature. He had left his last wife, sick with fever, at the hospital in Regina, to make his final journey alone.

"Jelly Roll! Rawhide!" he called out.

He snowshoed from the end of the winter road, where the warden truck had left him, over the still-frozen surface of Ajawan Lake. He did not know if his beavers would reply

this time. He had been gone several months, and worried that his friends had lost faith in his return.

"Lazy buggers!" His dialect had a tendency to slip when he was alone or absentminded. He trod wearily towards his cabin. He thought he noticed something on the grey horizon, or just under the grey sky, or just above the grey snow—one can never tell which up north—but he started towards it and staggered for some time before realising it was a rock on the shoreline.

He breathed haggardly, his face taut with concern. "Rawhide? Jelly Roll?" he paused, recalling his last return. "Sajo?"

Still, no response. The landscape was barren, save for the rock now near his feet, the copse of trees in the distance, and the handsome log building nestled amongst them, hanging over the edge of the shore with countless sticks bundled underneath: Beaver Lodge.

He made it home in a cold sweat—he had not been allowed to drink at the warden's cabin or in their truck. He stabilised himself on the rough hand-hewn logs as he leaned over, searching for a whiskey bottle in the low carved-out pantry. The floor, he noticed, was surprisingly clean: most of the strewn branches, wood chips, pine needles, and beaver feces coated in a layer of dust that veiled the smell of home he had come to welcome, and longed for while on the road. He found a bottle, mostly full, under the heavy, cast-iron stove. After only six years of use, it was beginning to rust from the humidity let in through the open floor that lead out of Beaver Lodge, straight into the lake. At that moment, the lodge was silent; Grey Owl sat on his bed waiting for the true season of spring to be announced by the slapping of beaver tails on open water.

He considered checking the guest cabin, the first 'pilgrims' (he often used the word sarcastically while in private company during his later years) would be arriving within six weeks and there would likely be much work to do after a long winter of disuse. But he simply sat in bed, nursing his bottle. His notebook lay on the small rough-topped desk, where it had sat untouched for the better part of two years. He had not expected the cabin to remain empty for so long, or for it to tell so few tales.

Eventually there was too much silence and he called out to his Beavers once again: "Jelly Roll! Rawhide! You can't sleep and get fat on bark forever. Spring is coming and this place stinks of dust and soggy wood."

He received no answer. He sat in silence, holding his bottle, staring at his notebook.

"Maybe they've gone and left without me," he wondered aloud. "Maybe they've gone and died without me."

*

Three days later, Grey Owl's fever was so severe that he knocked his last bottle of whiskey off his desk, spilling it across the dusty floor that still bore only tracks from the door to his bed. It was at that moment that he picked up the direct line to the warden cabin and called for help.

He was mumbling and slurring his words, blending his British and Ojibwe accents, dialects, and languages into an incoherent babble.

"What the hell did he say?" one warden asked the other.

"Something about either a flower or the floor, and something called an Oh-moo-day... maybe?"

"Totally wasted! Probably burnt himself on the stove and now he's crying for help."

"Kind of figured this day would come sooner or later, though. Best just to get to it."

They went and got him, those two park wardens. With a half-ton truck and a dog sled loaded in the back. They drove up the winter road, mushed across Ajawan, and loaded the man they suspected was not born Grey Owl onto the cargo bed. Back to the truck they mushed, then they lifted his semi-limp, dead weight into the back seat and left Ajawan.

He mumbled to them. All the way from the north end of Kingsmere—then called Namêkosis, or Big Trout—to the townsite of Waskesiu. He told them of his trials, his beavers, his journeys, his returns. He told them of Jelly Roll and Rawhide, of Sajo and Chilawee and Chikanee, and of how he was Meegwon and not Shapian.

And while the wardens thought that all they were hearing were the ramblings of a man left too long in isolation, of a 'drunken Indian' one of them would have said, still they listened. Listened to every sentence he said. And found later that they could recite every last word that he had pronounced on his final journey.

Upon arriving at the townsite it became obvious that Grey Owl required medical attention, and so the wardens drove him to the hospital in Prince Albert, unconsciously absorbing every word he said about his voyages. Along the way they asked if there was anyone they should contact for him, knowing that his most recent wife was in Regina and unfit to travel.

"Sajo," was his only response. Sadly, the wardens, one new to the Park and the other hostile to the man, were unfamiliar with Grey Owl's works and did not have the faintest idea as to who Sajo was.

The man known to all but one of his lovers as Grey Owl died of pneumonia in the hospital the next day. Anahareo had not come to visit, and no nurse was present to record his final words, though they could only have been, "Where is my Sajo?"

GHOST TOWN

to hold mass.

T. R. North

It was only a week after they murdered the priest that he came back to the church. He opened the doors and let himself in with no fanfare, and only the narrow trail of riverslime that traced his progress through the street spoke to things being amiss. Congregants watched him as he climbed into the pulpit, all of them goggle-eyed and silent as he began

The junkie, Maria, who had been a pianist before she'd fallen from grace, was the first to recover. Her full name, so far as the neighborhood was concerned, was Five-Dollar Maria, but in the church she was simply Maria because the priest would not permit discourtesy to a child of God in the face of the carved wooden crucifix. She went to the organ and began playing a soft, mournful melody—one of the first she'd learned, as a child, almost a dirge—to go with the priest's words, and eventually everyone else gave in to instinct and took to the pews.

The last to fall in were the prosecutors, who were irritated with the priest for returning like this. People had finally been outraged enough to testify—had almost been outraged enough to turn vigilante, but of course the prosecutors didn't want it to go that far—in a neighborhood where sudden and mysterious bouts of blindness in the face of crime were the order of the day.

It was one thing to murder a thief or a dealer or even a grocer who'd been well enough liked and kind but after all had owed the pimps money, but it had been something else, it turned out, to murder a priest. That the murderers had been policemen hadn't dimmed the prosecutors' zeal one whit. The cops who patrolled the slums infuriated the district attorney by flouting laws and collecting bribes in the open and thumbing their noses at the idea that they could be punished, which was a very different thing than the DA deciding that they would not be punished.

If the priest had been alive, a miraculous survivor of an attempted murder who could stare down his assailants in open court and tell the jury what they'd done to him, it would have been one thing. But his robes were dripping and his hair was matted with algae and his face was the color of fish scales, and if there was one thing the prosecutors could not do, it was swear in a dead man to point to the policemen who'd cuffed him to a cinderblock and thrown him from a footbridge and say, "They killed me." The judge wouldn't permit it, for one thing, and the jury would be affronted, and the defense attorneys would immediately call for a mistrial.

Maybe they could have done it a century ago, if the priest had agreed to expire permanently as soon as he'd testified; there were a few folksaints who'd done something similar. But these days, with stenographers recording the whole thing and artists sketching

it and reporters who'd talk about it on the evening news, it wouldn't be borne. The priest had the look of a man who intended to stick around for a while, a glint in his bulging eyes that spoke of a man who'd turned his back on heaven because his work on earth wasn't finished.

Maria thought that maybe that glint meant he'd been refused entrance instead of being the one to refuse. She'd had that happen to her once, though her doctors had told her it was the work of her dying brain, oxygen-starved neurons tricking her into a revelation while the EMTs worked to resuscitate her. She'd turned to heroin to forget about it, or at least distract herself from it, and it had mostly worked. She hadn't thought about it in years until she'd met the priest's gaze and known that look. He had always been kind to her, though, and she didn't intend to betray his secret.

The rest of the congregants had settled down by the time it came to hand out the wafers. They'd been riled up, ready to find the cops who'd killed their priest and do for them if the prosecutors couldn't promise a conviction. It had been a little much for the prosecutors, who understood and hated the way the police wouldn't respect them but who also couldn't abide by the thought of the mob seizing even a crumb of power back from the state.

It set a bad precedent, they said. It was a slap in the face of law and order, they said. Only the government was allowed to rein in its misfit children, they said.

With the priest back, he was already being demoted from 'their priest' back to just 'the priest,' the man from Ghana who'd asked for a difficult assignment to prove his devotion and been surprised to be posted in a developed country.

It likely helped that the locals hadn't known what to make of him even before he'd come trudging out of the river in his sodden clothes and disintegrating sandals. He'd been kind and good-humored and impervious to intimidation and utterly convinced that God would either protect him from retribution for calling out the unjust or reward him for his suffering in the afterlife, and there had been no one like him in a generation. The native saints and prophets the neighborhood produced were bitter as the soil in which they grew, bitter as Samuel chastising Saul in the witch's hut. The foreign priest had been a strange thing, and the dead priest transubstantiating crackers into Christflesh was a strange thing, and at the end of the day they had only traded one oddity for another.

The women poaching crawfish off the banks—better to risk the pollution than to surely starve—who'd seen him first had been in no position to call the authorities even in the event that they could've been trusted not to just put him back in again. It had been simpler to lay hands on a pair of tinsnips and cut the plastic binding the priest's hands around the heavy cement block and go back to fishing when he went back to walking than it had been to question the opacity of God's plan. Their report of it was easily condensed into a not-quite-casual, not-quite-whispered, "Did you hear the priest's back?", and it

spread in its own garbled way from street corner to street corner as quickly as the priest returned to his church.

By the time word had reached the neighborhood's borders and echoed back along the train tracks and powerlines, invisible but impermeable demarcations between plenty and poverty, a spontaneous decision had been made pertaining to the priest's memorials. A few had been stripped of their votives now that he was demonstrably in no position to intercede with God for anyone, but the majority had been redoubled, decked now with blue candles and blue flowers and fervent prayers for the other people lost to the river. It was a convenient and trustworthy—and therefore popular—place for depositing the tell-tale dead, in addition to the occasional unlucky child, drunk, or fisherman against whom no one but fate bore any ill-will, and it had served as a second graveyard for the neighborhood since the city's founding. The priest seemed as likely and economical a patron saint for those souls as anyone else, and so the slum was more than happy to shift the burden onto his shoulders.

The police much preferred the people they disappeared to stay disappeared until they'd at least begun drawing their pensions. Even there, though, the reaction was far from consistent. Those less plagued by imagination or conscience could not see significant harm in one man returning to his post after being discarded as an impediment to the constabulary, while everyone else saw him as a harbinger, the first starling of a flock. They had leisure to debate the issue at length due primarily to the fact that the people who'd hoped to form a posse and hadn't been parishioners also hadn't felt the need to wait while the priest gave his first mass since his death, and spent the time more productively by driving the men responsible for his murder from the parish with rocks, bottles, and whatever else was ready to hand.

No one was much assured by Maria carefully tidying the priest once the service was done, and her attempts to make him more presentable only served to highlight the way his skin had begun to slip around the edges and his anger had stamped deep and true into his features.

It was a few more days before anything of note happened, except that Maria moved into the rectory when it became clear that the priest had no more need of sleep or food but did need someone to keep him in fresh clothes and sweep away the petals as they dropped from offerings suddenly overflowing the transept. The cleaning woman who might have done it had fainted when she heard about the priest's murder and then, gripped by some premonition of things to come, had fled the city.

The priest preached as he had before the river, crying "Usury!" to the check-cashers and "Charity!" to the bail bondsmen and "Mercy!" to the landlords, and they received his sermons in much the same way as before, except with an added air of unease. They looked not at the priest, who might show some uncanny sign of his time submerged and besides could not be reasoned with except by a show of repentance, but at the loiterers and

passersby around them. These were their fellow sinners, people who might acknowledge the ridiculousness of their situation, this novelty of being harangued over petty sins by a man refused by God. No one would meet their eyes, though, each determined to turn his back on his neighbor and have his neighbors' backs turned on him when his time came. It was not, they said with their hurried steps and their hunched shoulders and their dropped eyes, their business.

It could not go on forever, and on the fourth night, the police returned to the slum as if nothing had happened. They were circumspect, for policemen in the slum, but that did not stop the priest from bursting from the church, standing in the road in front of their car, and shouting "Murderers!" at them with his full, deep voice, which the river had not been able to drown after all. They were not the policemen who had thrown him off the bridge, but, all the same, he wasn't wrong in his accusation. They were murderers, and hearing the accusation leveled against them in that voice, in that place, touched them to the quick.

They had emptied their guns into the priest before they realized that it was no good. The bullets struck him but did not seem to hurt him, and the people who had all week steadfastly refused to see the men the priest chastised now stared from alleys and half-boarded windows. The priest neither bled nor cried out in pain, but kept shouting "Murderers! Idolaters! Perjurers!" and listing all of their sins as if they were no more than gnats to be ignored or swept aside.

They did as they always did, and tried to call for backup, only to find that Maria had doused the car with gasoline and was striking a match. By the light of the flames, the neighborhood could see that she was untroubled and serene. The policemen had spent all their bullets on the uncaring priest, and there would be no braving the fire to reach her, not with so many eyes glittering in the darkness, throwing the light of their burning patrol car back at them, hungry in the way of flash floods and sinkholes and tornadoes.

They fled on foot, and they did not make it back to the station.

The next day brought a blackout, and so Maria sat on the sidewalk in the sun to mend the holes in the priest's robes. People who'd seen everything that happened but thought, between the heat and the darkness, that it felt too much like a fever dream to be real came and slid their fingers through the cloth and examined the gunpowder burns as she worked. Whenever she shook her head at their questions, ashes fell from her singed hair, which hung around her now like a curtain, and she only told them that they were late for mass.

The parishioners, ranks swollen with the curious and the angry and the inspired, took wine warm as blood and could taste river-silt in the host. It sat heavy and metallic on their tongues, and when the water was cut off along with the electricity, it did not occur to any of them not to go down to the banks with pails and drums and buckets to draw what they needed when tanks and cisterns ran dry.

It had not at first been a matter of note—the power failed and the water stopped flowing every so often in the heat and in the droughts, siphoned to parts of the city which could pay more or whose lines were less corroded. Before they might have called the aldermen, or the power company, or the number on the back of the last bill they'd paid. But the police had not been back since that night, and their calls were cut short the moment they described their location, and so they knew that at long last they had been abandoned, the neighborhood the mayor had once called a weeping sore excised from the city's face. Riots could be quelled. Protesters could be jailed or, in extreme straits, listened to. But there was no dealing with dead men publishing the state's wrongdoing to an audience of people it would not admit to the ballot or the workhouse.

The river gave where men wouldn't, though, its waters rising to meet every need, and it seemed only natural to Maria, when she asked to be baptized, that it be in the same place which had given her this calling. She went back to the spot where the priest had emerged, greeted the women with their nets and their pots, and followed the priest into the murk.

She was the first, her previous life carried to the sea by the sluggish current, reborn to something greater than she'd been before there, ankle-deep in the weeds and slime and cold hands on her shoulders and that deep voice calling to God to witness his works. There was a steady parade to come after, though, and when the people who followed the priest came back out of the water, they knew themselves to be different, no longer of the earth. They knew themselves to be holy. They knew themselves to carry a salvation as old and certain as the tide, and just as unforgiving.

CALL OF THE MILD

GRANT PRICE

"Yah, yah, maybe, hmm, maybe. No, oh no. Definitely not."

Although it is rush hour, the man has four yellow plastic seats' worth of real estate all to himself. His head is cocked and his eyes appear to be scanning the ceiling of the subway car as he spits out words through grey teeth. He keeps cuffing his nose with the back of his coat sleeve. Slug trails criss-cross the fabric like pick-up sticks. The car does the two-step shuffle and the man's scraggly body bobs along with it.

"There? Perhaps?"

The man is called Jerome. Strictly speaking, his name should be spelled with an acute accent and a circumflex, but he dropped them long ago in an attempt to become a streamlined, unencumbered version of himself. That was back when he'd had ideas about how he'd find his Purpose in Life and Live the Dream. Ah, ambition. Such is youth. On occasion, the echo of his former self still brings a smile to Jerome's face.

Jerome used to tell people he was like one of those vending machines stuffed full of prizes that you were supposed to drag out with a claw, but never could. The listener would ask why and Jerome would respond with a flourish that he had the same problem with his ideas. He could see them inside his Perspex box of a body, sitting atop the remnants of poor decisions and memories coloured carmine with embarrassment and other grim stuff that seemed to grow with each passing year. But he never seemed to be able to grasp them. Even today, Jerome would be the first to agree that his is a classic case of wasted potential. But he doesn't blame anybody for it, not even himself.

Jerome's shoes have no shoelaces. He slouches in his seat, head still cocked, mouth hanging slightly open. He could be marionette, or a dog waiting to be taken for a walk.

He is wearing a leopard-print t-shirt, a crackly anorak and a pair of tight jeans that had been delicately liberated from a store several weeks ago. Jerome had performed the old switcheroo, which goes something like this: dive into the changing room, whip off the discoloured trousers, ease on the clean new ones and then hightail it to the exit. Unfortunately, the ruse had been ruined when a zealous employee spotted the tag peeking out from the waistband. Jerome had screamed and brought a rack of clothes to the floor before making a run for it. That area of the city is now off-limits until further notice. In any case, they are good jeans. Figure-hugging, yet resilient.

"But . . . but . . . no," says Jerome.

The car pulls in to the next stop and a couple hops aboard and sits down opposite Jerome without taking the time to appraise him and realise that perhaps it would be better to park their bodies elsewhere. Jerome continues his scrutiny of the ceiling and pays them no attention. The man and woman are holding hands. Their words melt together and they look at each other through eyes made of cartoon hearts and everything is wonderful until they realise that the scent catching in the hairs of their nostrils isn't temporary. Jerome, it should be mentioned, has an odour that could generously be called idiosyncratic. Now the couple notices him. The man is an all-action kind of guy, and he is about to stand up and lead his girlfriend away from the weasel-faced creature that has evidently been balled up, thrown onto the yellow plastic seat and left to rot until one of the cleaning staff scoops it into a dustpan, when Jerome lowers his gaze from the roof of the train and speaks.

"I do apologise for the interruption, but might you be able to tell me where the stop for Hopline Square is?" His voice is the sound of air being shot through a broken flute with jagged finger holes. He looks at the couple. They are unable to disguise the horror on their faces.

Jerome is used to this. He knows his facial features leave something to be desired. Fuchsartig, is what a jolly foreign fat man on a bus had once called him. His top two maxillary central incisors protrude awfully and his eyes are small black buttons. It doesn't help that he suffered from acne as a youth, which has left his skin all nobbled and bobbled like a melted plastic mask. But Jerome is nothing if not patient with people, so he waits for them to recover from their spiritual recoil and answer him.

"Where did you say?"

The question comes from the woman. Jerome grabs a handful of his anorak at chest level and draws it tight. His eyelid quivers. The man's eyes are narrowed, as though he is trying to sense some kind of trick.

"Hopline Square. I seem to be unable to pinpoint its whereabouts." Jerome directs his index finger to the roof of the car, on which a spaghetti map of lines has been printed. He hopes he isn't slurring his words. Sometimes he finds it difficult to tell. The man makes a noise and his lips disappear into his mouth.

It is the last chance saloon for Jerome. He needs to get to the Square to see a man about a dog. He's feeling positively altricial. The cramps are coming on and he has to avoid a full-blown assault at all costs because he has a weak constitution and his body isn't built to sustain the express elevator ride to hell. His other options are expended and he only has one left. And, actually, there is no guarantee that this one will work out either. But he has to try. He isn't ready to give up yet, that way leads to savagery of the soul.

"Go two more stations and switch to the south line until you reach Connan Street,' says the woman. 'Then take the suburban line for one stop. Westbound, I think."

Jerome smiles his ratty smile and it has the opposite effect of what he intends, because it is a smile dripping with what looks to be predatory instinct, not gratitude. He can't help it. At school he was asked to remain stoic in class photographs. The man places a hand on the woman's knee and squares his shoulders. They think that perhaps Jerome's question was a ploy to embroil them in a conversation from which only he can emerge victorious. He is quick to try to set their minds at ease.

"Thank you kindly. You have been most helpful."

He notices that he is gripping his jacket too severely. He allows his hand to fall into his lap, where it twitches like a stunned fish. He becomes aware that he hasn't showered for a while. In fact, he cannot remember the last time he stood under a jet of warm water, scraped the downy fuzz from his face, or brushed his excrescent teeth. He will though, one day.

"Always seem to lose my bearings."

The woman nods. The man's hand remains on her knee. Jerome's is already rising to resume its role as a makeshift clasp. The train arrives at the next stop and Jerome sees Wild Bill, a panhandler. Wild Bill doesn't like Jerome. Jerome couldn't say that he particularly enjoys Wild Bill's company either. Fortunately, he is out of his mind on something and lurches past Jerome without the embers of recognition glowing in his eyes. Jerome exhales with relief, which is unfortunate for his new companions because his breath is as bitter as a blocked drain.

Jerome wishes he had a watch. He pawned the one his father gave him. A month or so back he stole another, but that one had to be sold too. He doesn't have the energy to ask the woman for the time. Besides, their distress appears to be quite enough as it is. He starts counting the seconds in his head, but they soon unravel into a plate of noodle numbers and he leaves them where they are.

Now there is a new sensation. It overcomes him before he can do anything to stop it. His stomach gurgles and he shifts his body and he feels the dissatisfying wetness against the seat of his trousers and he knows he's done it again. The last time it had happened he'd spent half an hour expunging the contaminated area in a public toilet using an anorexic roll of paper and his hands. He makes an exploratory movement to check the scale of the damage. Only a little has leaked out, but it isn't odourless. The couple sitting opposite will notice soon. Then others will catch the hint of human ordure in the already-stale air. It is imperative that he leave the scene as soon as possible. The train slows down again.

"Please exit in the direction of travel."

The disembodied voice lacks humanity. The man who nobody here knows is called Jerome rises to his feet. The anorak covers his behind. The seat fabric is clean. Before he leaves the car, he makes a kind of small, stiff bow to his aides.

"I bid you good evening."

He says it with as much dignity as he can muster. He does it to show his partners in dialogue that he is not uneducated. Nor is he an insect to be swatted. Far from it. Still, the words sound unnerving coming from him. He does not realise it, but it is one of the reasons why he isn't able to count on many of the other regulars when he's hard up. They think he is above his station. Jerome would laugh if they told him that. He doesn't think people should have to be stuck at a particular station just to align with the expectations of others. He is his own human being.

EXCOMMUNICATION

CARMEN CARRIÓN

Liliana peered out into the night from her upstairs bedroom window, waiting for her father to get home so they could celebrate her eighth birthday.

The rest of the family had given up waiting on him, but she just couldn't have her birthday cake without Papa being here.

Liliana's eyes searched the dark for a glimpse of him.

It was much later and her eyes were beginning to close when Liliana heard Papa long before she could see him. He was singing Cielito Lindo like it wasn't the middle of the night and like the neighbors weren't already sleeping. Papa's voice was sloppy, his words running into one another but still in tune.

She watched him sashay onto their block, under the streetlight, his steps keeping time with his song. Papa danced toward her, danced in his shiny wingtip shoes, his Sunday shoes, only it wasn't Sunday, just her eighth birthday he forgot. Those shiny shoes stumbled into the bushes, the trees, the garbage cans with a clatter that interrupted his song for barely a second before he took it up again and their neighbor Doña Ibel raised her window to yell out words Liliana wasn't allowed to hear.

Papa tipped his hat toward Doña Ibel and raised the volume of his voice like Liliana raised the volume on the radio when she wanted to make her Mamá pay attention.

The old dog next door took up Papa's song and all the neighborhood dogs joined in. By the time he got to their yard, staggered through the gate, and trampled over the blue forget-me-nots Mamá watered every day, Liliana noticed lights flashing on, all up and down the block.

Not that Papa noticed. He didn't even notice Liliana hanging out the upstairs window.

Liliana inspected Papa from above, looking for a ribbon or a gift in his jacket pockets, looking for any sign Papa had remembered her birthday.

She didn't get long to look because as soon as Papa was inside the gate, he headed straight to one of his "hiding spots" in the yard where he kept his botellitas of refreshment because when he tried to hide his special bottles inside, Mamá emptied them all out in the sink, and boy did he get loud then.

Liliana didn't know about the bottle he was pulling out from under the funny-shaped stone by the rose bush, but she bet Mamá did. Mamá knew all his secrets.

Papa held the bottle like a baby and wiped the dirt off and Liliana spotted the gold crown on the label – Ron Rico. Papa said Ron Rico refreshments were the best, only Mamá said he always had money for el Ron when he should be spending more of it on his family and they always got loud after that.

Papa held the bottle up high and the moon made the liquid inside shine gold, and maybe it was magic like Papa said, because anytime he drank it he got so happy and smiley and just laughed and laughed, and it was fun being with him. Sometimes he talked Mamá into having some, and she'd sip or tip some into a plant, and she'd start smiling too.

So when Papa tipped the bottle back and took a long swallow, Liliana expected more of the same: the smiles, then the laughs. Papa could be so funny.

Instead he spit the liquid onto the ground, smashed the bottle on the stone, and started to shout so loud her hair stood up and Liliana covered her ears with both hands.

He yelled for Mamá. Ran to the front door, rattled the door knob, tried to open it and couldn't. He roared for Mamá again, louder.

In the hallway outside her bedroom, Liliana heard Mamá laugh and then Mamá rushed into Liliana's room and screamed out the window to Papa.

"You want to drink? Drink that!" Mamá laughed in a hard way, looking down with eyes so thin Liliana thought she didn't much want to see Papa.

Liliana's baby brother Tito and her little sister Teresa ran into her room, fresh from sleep, all big eyes and wild hair.

Downstairs, Papa pounded the front door, demanding to be let in.

Mamá ran down the stairs and Liliana followed her, Tito and Teresa trailing right behind.

Liliana hesitated on the steps as Mamá ran into the dark front hall and stood shouting at Papa through the closed door.

Everything that came out of her mother's mouth was fresh, Liliana thought, fresh like she was always telling Liliana not to be when she talked back. For anything Papa yelled at her mother, Mamá had a smart answer ready.

"You're going to pay, woman!" yelled Papa.

"Drinking piss is too good for you, old man!" Mamá was pleased at her own cleverness in substituting the golden rum with a golden stream of her own.

"Hijo! Open the door!" Liliana thought Papa sounded tired.

"Why should I?" Mamá paced in front of the door, motioning the kids back up the stairs.

Papa shouted, "Open this door right now or I'm not responsible!"

Mamá shouted right back, "Not responsible! Of course you're not!" Mamá laughed but to Liliana, the laugh sounded scary.

Papa would not be laughed at, and he hit the door again. Sitting on the stairs, Liliana, Teresa and Tito jumped. Liliana felt Teresa's hand slip into hers and then Tito's, and they all held hands, eyes on their mother, quiet. Papa pounded and punched the door so hard it shook and Liliana was afraid it would fall in. He pounded till the walls rattled and the Sacred Heart of Jesus statue tumbled from its shelf on the wall and crashed into pieces on the floor. Jesus' upraised arm flew into a corner and his head slid across the tiles and landed at Mamá's feet.

Mamá stopped laughing. Words seemed to have left her. Liliana knew the statue came from Mamá's mother, who'd gone to meet the angels last year.

Mamá's hands trembled as she reached out to gather the pieces together, trying to make the statue whole again but she soon gave up and shook her head, hopeless. Mamá cradled the largest piece, the one with the sacred heart on it, and sat on the floor looking at it, ignoring the pounding on the door, her tears running silver in the half-light from the kitchen.

Mamá looked up and noticed Liliana, Tito and Teresa sitting on the stairs watching her. Liliana had never seen her mother cry and it scared her.

Mamá stood up swiftly, wiped her eyes.

She banged on the door to get Papa's attention.

"You act like an animal, then sleep with the animals! Go! Lie down with the dogs!"

Papa yelled a response, but it was late and he was tired, Liliana thought, because soon he stopped shouting and the dogs stopped barking.

Outside, the neighbors' house lights turned off, one by one, all up and down the block.

Inside, Liliana, Tito and Teresa held hands as they sat on the stairs with only the light from the kitchen spilling into the dark hallway.

Liliana's mother looked at her three children, sitting silently on the shadowy stairs, and she motioned them down and into the kitchen.

They sat around the table that held Liliana's birthday cake and Mamá lit the candles

one by one and Liliana and Teresa and Tito counted them off as she lit them, all the way up to eight. Then she turned off the kitchen light and the glow of the candles lit their faces.

Mamá brushed the hair back from Liliana's face and kissed her on both cheeks and whispered, "Make a wish, Liliana."

Liliana didn't really think wishes came true. But she hoped. Wishes were magic, right? Liliana closed her eyes and wished as hard as she knew how that Papa could be with them and that it was all good between him and Mamá and that it would stay good, like when Papa had his refreshments.

She opened her eyes and above the circle of candles, Liliana saw Mamá's face, and Teresa's and Tito's, all smiling at her. She took a big breath and blew all eight of those red candles out and they were left sitting in the dark with only a finger of moonlight lighting the room and the white coconut cake.

Tito and Teresa clapped and Mamá said she got them all in one breath – her wish would certainly come true.

But Liliana didn't believe her any more. Hadn't she said Papa would be home for her birthday dinner? Hadn't Papa said he'd be there? Liliana reminded herself wishes were for children and hadn't Mamá said just this morning she was a big girl now? Liliana blinked fast. Her throat hurt and her heart thumped her chest so hard she could feel each beat.

Mamá got up and lit a tall candle to Saint Jude, and by candlelight Mamá cut each of them fat slices of coconut cake and poured cold milk into the fancy wine glasses she and Papa kept for company. She made a toast to Liliana and they all clinked their glasses together and ate cake and drank milk and talked in whispers while outside the door, Papa slept with only the dogs and the moon.



There were Romans, there were Huns, and there was a mountain. Taking out his silver pocket watch, Hirohito found that its hands had stopped moving. "How long have we been marching?" he asked aloud, as the Spartans passed him by. Ever still and ever silent, the mountain just pointed upwards at the moon.

THE DUKE'S DIOXIDE SUNSET

CLIO VELENTZA

It was in a hazy dream of crumbling, pinkish Venice that I first met the Duke. I was struck by the extraordinary resemblance of his milky green eyes to the soft-sucking waves of the lagoon. It was from washing every day in the canals, he had confided. The brackish foam refined the features. Though most likely it was just another effect of the radioactive waste, gradually turning us all into briny mutations. Radiation was a matter of belief, the Duke had assured me. Everything glowed in a dioxide sunset, anyway.

I was always a little bit in love with him, so I humored his absurdity and whenever he patted his pockets and asked if I could, just this once, pick up the bill. Perhaps everyone was in love with the Duke. You had to be to survive those bleak mornings, of neon clouds and smoke plumes puffing through sidewalk cracks, as if the city was oscillating on a volcano.

I wondered if his beauty was entirely the cause of his charm. For the rest of us, generations of disfigurement might have gone unnoticed if it weren't for the Duke, whose ancestry of inbreeding had produced some kind of genetic resistance. He alone remained: a testament to a misty past. His own legend, perhaps already dissolving into memory. We were enthralled by him, trapped in the thin line between world and self, between love and hate.

My boy! he would exclaim, although we were the same age – my boy! And he would grab my hand with those slender fingers, their tips painted to maintain the illusion they still had nails. *Would you believe that I'm the last one?*

I learned that beauty could be itself a monster, if so far removed from life. The Duke was too alive, with his polite, wet lips and his thin gooseflesh skin even on those seething nights. Impossible for anyone to fit him into a dusty halo. His existence was a dissonance in an era of resignation. Who wanted to be reawakened to the pain of loveliness and longing? Who wanted to be reminded of hope?

It was too much.

Were we ever so cruel? I saw no violence in the end of the Duke. There was only the embarrassing revelation that even someone so exquisite was nothing but a vessel for hot poisonous blood. It was with gentleness that we drowned him so that he would remain young and unspoiled. It was with reverence that we cut and drained him into the pulsating canals he so adored, in hope that his blessing would seep into the city.

And it was with love, that very same love and exaltation—it was with great roars of heartache and ecstasy that we carried the sublime corpse away—on that glorious

smoldering evening. All of us huddled there in a gloaming of fumes, heaving ropes that blistered our weak, twisted hands. Lifting the Duke up the acid-scarred battlements, body like a limp flag.

THE TRIGGER DOES NOTHING BUT GIVE

Hannah Craig

Real men have theirs in hand. Real change, real gold. Whatever they touch hardens. There's a force in compulsion, but it gets sweeter as the night flits by. It gets sweeter the more the dancing girls protest. The more they place their silken heads on the armrest and ask:

"How much farther to the bridge? How much farther to the mountain ridge? O black mountain, iron father, what time does the nightstriker ride? What time is left in the breath of this elizabeth?"

Their mouths leave wet cauldrons on the window. What stirs? What's in you, deep? The car's in the leaves with an engine that sleeps. With windows that weep at stoplights. Real men drive chariots and drink fire. Real men have backyard pools and blue springs and spirits of nitre.

It gets sweeter the longer the story goes. The stranger the story grows. The more perfect the still-soft egg in the mouth of the goose-girl. The more deformed the oyster in the mouth of a pearl. It gets sweeter and then harder.

DILIGENT GARDENER

VINCENT POTURICA

On a wooden stage there's a man who looks so peaceful as he takes apart his body, piece by piece, with a sharp kitchen knife. There goes his pinky finger. There goes his shoulder. The man begins to float—only an inch or two—above the stage. He chops off his right leg at the knee. He rises. Now he's cutting thick slices off his torso that flop like fish when they hit the stage.

The man is a good three feet in the air—just an arm and a neck and a head. But there goes the head rolling past our feet, blinking its eyes like a newborn and smiling. And there goes the neck like the stump of a tree.

Now the hand is rising steadily. But then the hand stops, pausing for a moment before it begins to trim the clouds.

A FLASH OF FALLIBLE HEAVEN

LASHER LANE

In his well-worn recliner, in front of the TV with a beer, her husband laughed, as he watched countless fortune cookies fall on Socorro's head, upon opening the kitchen cabinets. Superstitious, she'd kept fifteen years-worth, never throwing the unopened ones away, wishing the Chinese man didn't put so many in their once-a-month takeout. Never having the chance to eat them all, she thought it bad luck to get rid of the wrapped ones, as if they might offer the means to a positive future, but the opened ones, read to her by her husband, only held empty promises, which she'd quickly discard.

Their North Hollywood bungalow sat on an acre that was once farmland decades ago. She and and her husband called it home for as long as she'd collected those cryptic cookies. The only Spanish-speaking couple on the block, through the years they'd simply exchange friendly waves with neighbors. Though her husband could speak and read it, Socorro blamed her attempt at broken English for the reason others never invited her past their front door.

A gardener and housecleaner, they both longed for the day when they'd be retired. Learning English bit by bit, she was reminded of how the prefix re- could indicate repetition, to do something repeatedly, again and again, and repeatedly tired was how they both felt. His hands never healing from pesticides and inclement weather, her own, raw from toxic cleaning products. He was as tired of mowing lawns and clearing brush as she was of cleaning houses, only to have to come home and clean her own.

Three days a week, Socorro's gringa boss would pick her up, then drop her at each house, calling every half hour to check on her progress, making sure she'd be on time to clean the next. She'd hold back tears, dusting family photos of others' children, some who'd be the same age as her own daughter, if she'd come home ten years ago and wasn't found in a Dumpster blocks from her elementary school, her tiny body, bound, gagged and sexually assaulted, yet another little girl discarded like trash, the significance of her life equal in the killer's eyes to the contents meant for the Hefty bag she was found in.

Once an avid churchgoer, she prayed and prayed for her only child's return, but when she didn't, Socorro lost faith, and for the first time in her life, doubted the existence of heaven and hell. Her only solace was saving to buy Chinese takeout once a month. She'd walk to her favorite Chinese restaurant, passing the 1940's bungalows, daydreaming of a life not meant for her, imagining when the area was verdant, apricot groves, surrounded by movie studios, with silent screen sirens in glittering, glamorous clothes, with severe haircuts and exaggerated eye makeup, reaching to pick fruit, while men dressed in suits laid on picnic blankets, a bottle of wine nearby.

Once, along with the usual generous amount of fortune cookies, the man put some

paper placemats with pictures of the zodiac in her bag. "Chinese New Year," he said. "Year of the Sheep. Unlucky year to be born." He shook his head and laughed. She just smiled and nodded, only understanding the words Chinese and New Year.

At home, she set the coffee table in the living room with the zodiac placemats. Instead of her own worn-out flatware and dinnerware, she'd set out plates and cutlery, never in her budget, which she'd "borrow" from houses she cleaned, returning them each week, their owners never noticing the missing items.

To help her with English, she and her husband would eat dinner while watching cable news. Peppered with medication ads making it seem inevitable that all Americans would succumb to heart disease, diabetes, fibromyalgia, cancer, arthritis, cataracts, psoriasis, cancer and stroke, they both wondered why these had to be commonplace and accepted without question, each laughing at the erectile dysfunction ads, shown much more frequently than the others, as if achieving an erection was more critical than curing other ailments.

When finished eating, Socorro would open a fortune cookie, passing it to her husband to read: "He who has no faith, has no future." Again, he read it in Spanish, "Quién no tiene fe, no tiene futuro."

After he read them, she'd usually take the cookies from him to eat, but she didn't take this one, and facing him, sitting sideways near the edge of the couch, her hands in her lap, she just shrugged. Since her daughter's murder, she wasn't sure if she even had a future, but she knew she had no faith.

Her husband put the cookie down, and noticing the placemat, moved his plate slightly to the side to better see it. He pointed to the years they were both born. He was born in the year of the rat.

"Su año es no afortunado," he said, pointing to the year of the sheep.

Never realizing what zodiac animal represented her birth year, her eyes went wide, only then remembering the Chinese man saying "sheep," and what "unrucky" must have meant. Now 2015, this was the year of the sheep, the calendar coming around again.

Seeing her expression, her husband laughed and waved his hand, dismissing the placemat, saying, "Basura supersticiosa," not realizing superstition wasn't garbage to her.

She was outside washing her windows, a task she dreaded. Overhearing someone speaking Spanish, she turned to find a woman on a cell phone, pushing Socorro's elderly, next-door neighbor, Elsa in a wheelchair. Excited to hear her native language, she put down her cleaning supplies and quickly walked over to introduce herself, apologizing for interrupting the woman's phone call. The woman, Reyna, would be Elsa's new live-

in caretaker. They became fast friends, Socorro meeting Reyna and Elsa on her days off. They'd walk to the park, where they'd sit on a bench, sharing life stories, both good and bad, while Elsa, in her wheelchair, sat quietly, throwing stale bread to the pigeons. For months, they met each morning, Socorro asking Reyna to speak to her in English as much as possible during their heart-to-heart talks.

As summer turned to fall, Socorro noticed she didn't see them walking anymore. She knocked on Elsa's door, and Reyna invited her in for coffee, saying Elsa wasn't feeling well and was too weak to get out of bed. Both women stood in the doorway to Elsa's room, Socorro smiling and waving, asking in Spanish how her neighbor felt. With Reyna translating, Elsa frowned and shook her head. With no more walks to the park, on her days off, coffee at Elsa's house became Socorro's new morning ritual.

**

Most nights, Socorro's husband's snoring forced her to move to the living room. Hoping to catch up on some much needed rest, she took a spare blanket and lay down on the sofa. With its tiny pillows, she faced the wall. After a few minutes of lying with her eyes closed, the room grew intensely cold, and she wondered if the front door had blown open, which would often happen if she forgot to use the deadbolt. Hearing a brief flutter, as if wings were beating, She shivered, eyes closed, remembering the time a single crow flew down the living room's chimney and got trapped in their fireplace. She knew one crow meant bad luck. She recalled her husband wrestling with the bird, then finally releasing it outside. The last earthquake had cracked their chimney. Not having money to repair it, they'd stopped using the fireplace, putting a sheet over the screen, watching the house breathe the wind. As she lay there, she knew she had to get up to check if the front door had blown open.

Still facing the wall, too cold, colder than she'd ever been in her life, she felt a large hand clasp the top of her head, the fingertips pressing into her skull so hard it was painful. Thinking it was her husband jokingly trying to get her to come back to bed, her thoughts turned to robbery. In the past, her husband often reminded her that even though North Hollywood looked like any small town, it was part of the city of Los Angeles, and there were many armed robberies, even the elderly man who lived a few houses down was robbed and shot in the eye through his door's peephole. She froze, guessing this was her end. Convinced she'd be murdered while her husband slept in the back of the house, she laid still, pondering her next move, knowing her only chance was to turn herself around quickly, quick enough to escape the intruder's grasp, while running for the gun her husband kept hidden in a hallway drawer. The large hand let go of the top of her head, and the intruder stepped back away from the couch. Socorro saw from the corner of her eye a creature the color of stone, lit from within. Giant and otherworldly, it rose to the ceiling. It stared down at her, with a look not of fear, love or hate, but of bewilderment. It wore a mesh-like gown unlike any material she'd seen on earth, its many-feathered wings

flapping in slow motion, where the room's ceiling should have been, ignoring all laws of physics.

Soccoro looked up and smiled at the divine creature. Returning no emotion, it flew straight through the wall and was gone in a flash. She ran to the window, looking past rooftops and trees to the sky but saw nothing. Unable to sleep, she switched on the lamp, staying on the couch until at last she nodded off.

At dawn, as a ray of sunlight through the blinds awoke her, Socorro remembered the reason she lay awake all night. Clearly not a dream, that was an angel she saw. She wouldn't tell her husband, he'd only laugh. Opening the shutters to let the sun in, she noticed an ambulance in front of Elsa's house, no siren, only its lights flashing. Two paramedics stood in a circle talking with Reyna and a strange man Socorro thought to be Elsa's son. Reyna looking concerned, holding herself tightly, arms folded across her chest, as if she were cold. Then the man climbed into the back of the ambulance, the paramedics drove away, and Reyna walked back into the house. Socorro quickly dressed and ran across the street, knocking on Elsa's door. Reyna invited her for coffee. Socorro could see she'd been crying and sat at the kitchen table while she was told that Elsa had passed away only a few hours before.

"She was muy frio con tres mantas," Reyna said, then explained that Elsa looked up and raised her arms, as if wanting someone to lift her, and fell over dead.

Looking down, Reyna held back tears, her hands folded around her coffee mug.

Socorro's heart jumped. If angels came to comfort the dying and collect the dead, did they make mistakes, come to the wrong houses?

Squeezing her eyes tightly shut, Socorro blessed herself, making the sign of the cross with her right hand.

SWAN SONG

PHOEBE CRAMER

When I was winged and I had sisters, when I was still a thing that flew, there came a hurricane. Blown far from home to a land that dripped with Spanish moss, feathers heavy with rain, wings faltering in the wind, our flock had no choice but to land and to transform. Shed our feathers, wait out the storm. Huddled together, cold and naked, but firmly grounded by our now-human feet and our now-human heaviness, we stood, my sisters and I, in silence beneath the tree cover, shivering. The world was blue and grey and flashing, no part of it still.

I'm not sure what the man was doing out in such foul weather. I've never known what drove him from the warmth of his mother's home that day. I didn't see him then, though he saw me, and I didn't ask him later. When the thunder ceased we heartened. As the sun rose, the rain subsided. By midday the earth had started to dry out, slowly, like bath water from a tub with a drain clogged with hair. We let the sun warm our strange skin. As the afternoon waned, the time came to pull our feathers out from the thatch under which we'd stowed to shield them from the downpour. Each of my older sisters found her own and shook her wings dry, took her proper shape. Each except for me. I had not seen the man in the storm but he had seen me.

My sisters took their bird forms. I did not. All around me now, my family stood as swans. They watched me searching, frantic, through the leaves and swampy earth. Hands and knees, fingernails and elbows, whole body caked in mud. Night fell and they grew impatient, flew away, left me behind.

That's when the man stepped out of the shadows, my plumage captured in his fleshy hands.

"At last," he said, "we are alone. I love you," he said. "Marry me."

After we were married, we moved into his family home and lived there with his aging mother, their wormy dog, and three or four chickens kept for their eggs. Whenever one stopped laying she would be dinner. White and dark meat. Leg. Breast. Wing.

In time I bore my husband's sons. Pushed their slimy, skinny souls into the world, shell-less and vulnerable, from the cleft in my wrong-body. When they were children we played these never-ending games of hide and seek. The children delighted in them, little smiles illuminating their little faces when I found them and they got to ask "again?"

Jeremy. Avery. Gordon. Sebastian. James. Wilhelm. Peter. Samuel. Malcolm. These were the names of my children, oldest to youngest. Malcolm especially loved the game. My baby. Small enough to crawl up into the lofted part of the derelict chicken coop or

curl into a ball inside the oven, and always the last to be found. The game could go on for hours, the way that Malcolm played. As I found his brothers, one by one they would join me in the continued search for him. High and low, indoors and out, upstairs and down, between the cushions of the couches.

It was on a cold day that we found him in the wardrobe in the hall, up at the back of the high shelf where my husband kept his collection of thick fur hats.

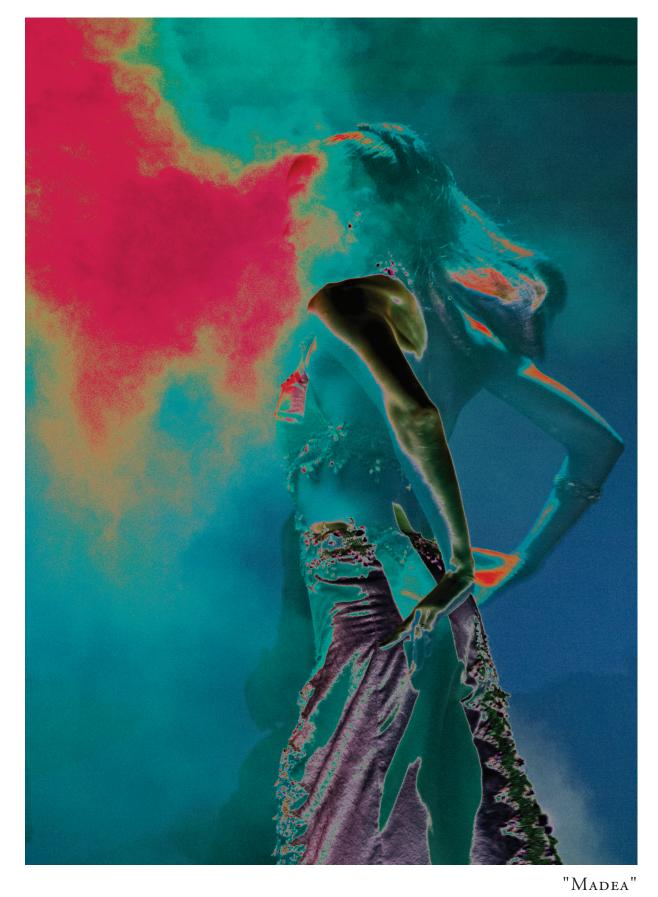
"How'd you get up there?" Jeremy asked as we joined together to pull him free from the narrow space. Down tumbled my youngest son and with him something I did not recognize at first, turned from white to grey with dust, tucked away at the back of the hat shelf in the wardrobe—a place too high, too far for me to ever reach—smelling of mildew and of closet. Molting.

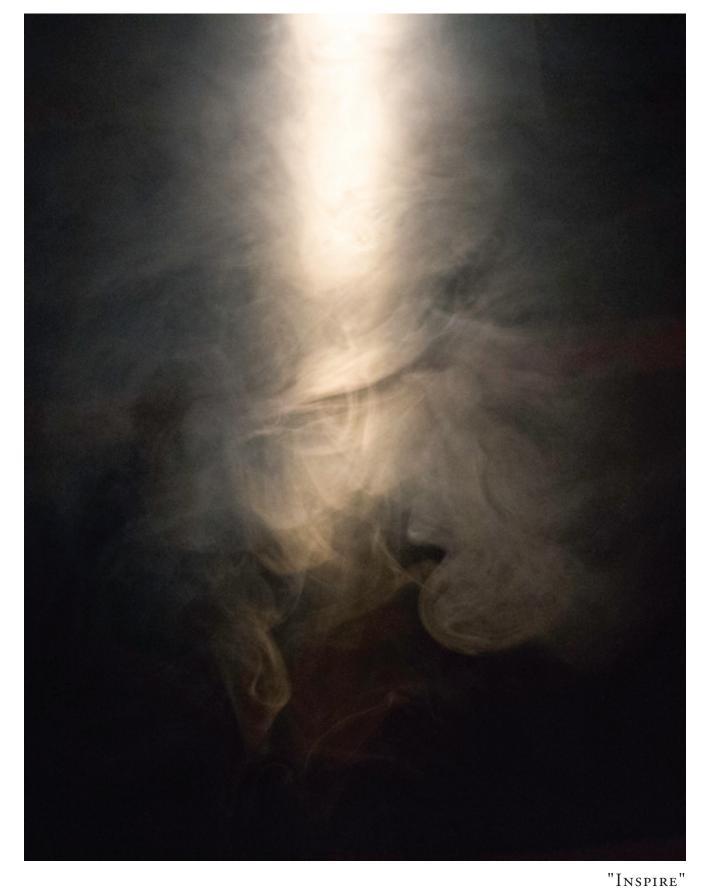
"What's that?" asked James, nose wrinkled at the filthy thing.

I took it up, myself into my hands. I said to the boys, "Tell your father I've gone."



JENNIE MACDONALD

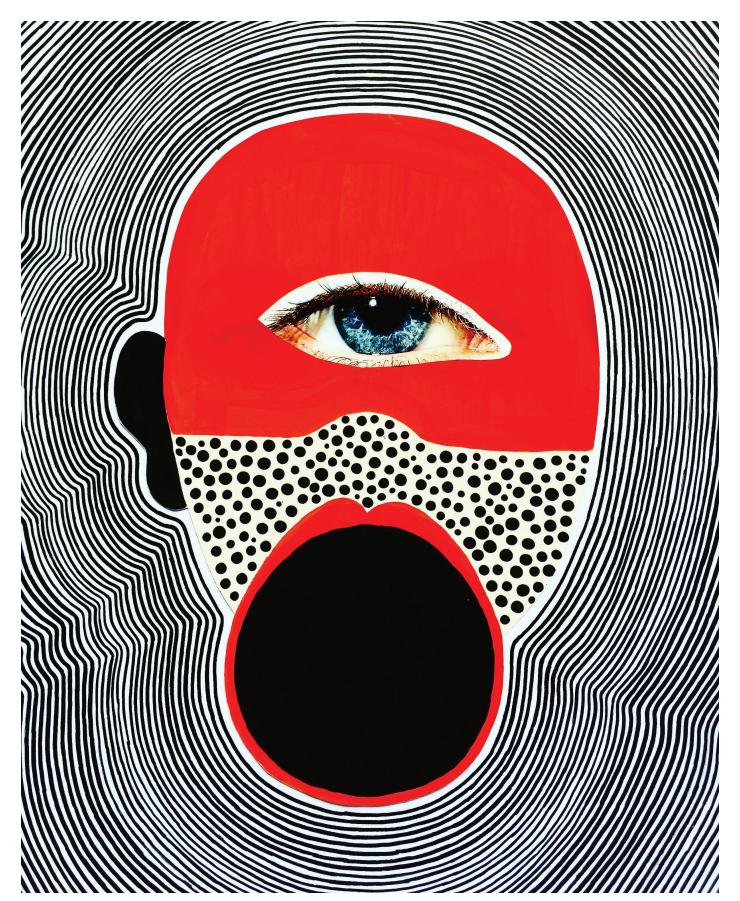




ANDRÉA ACKER







From "Cyclops Series: Polyphemus & Friends"





FROM "Cyclops Series: Polyphemus & Friends"

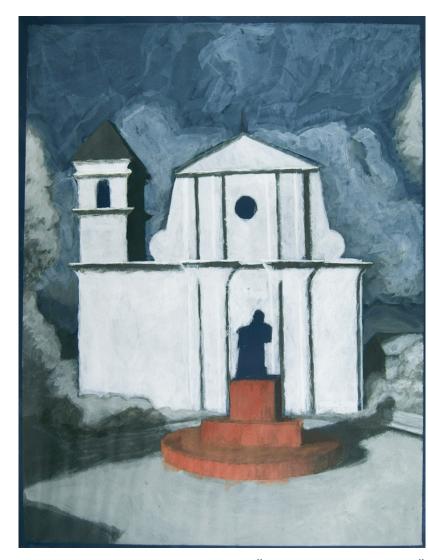
ASHLEY OWENS DESMOND HERZFELDER



"Dancing in the Purple"



"Coin Collector"

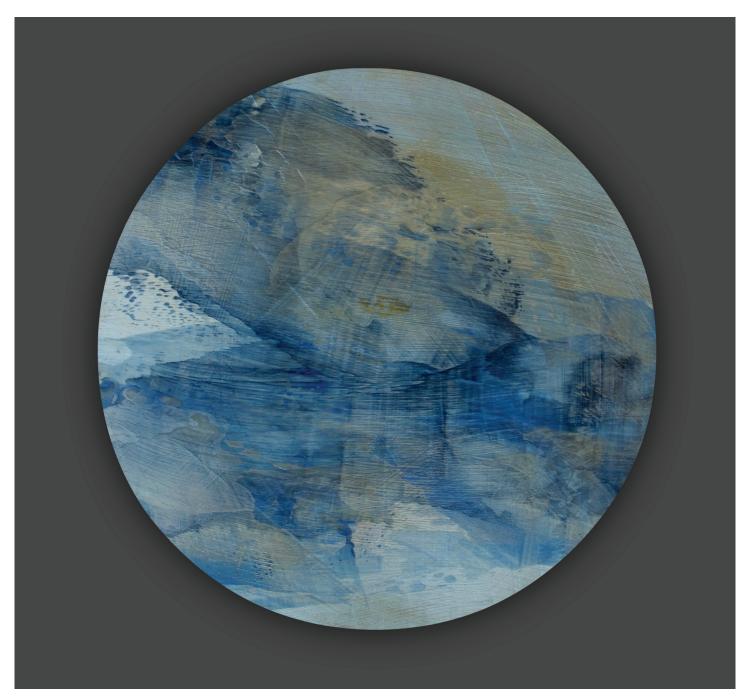


"Midnight Prayer"



"Ozymandias"

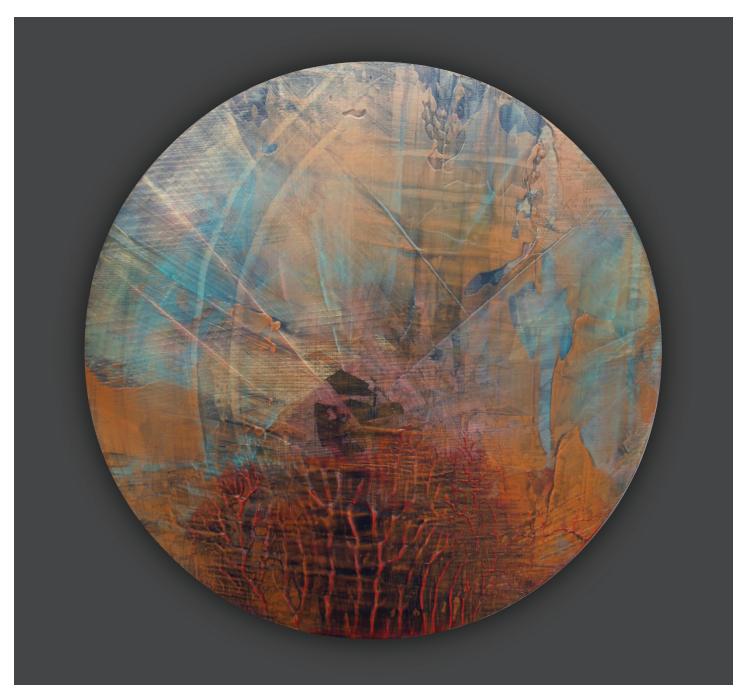
MEGAN LARMIE







"Nautilus"





"Rain and Rust"

"Time Spent With You"

POESIA

RED FIRE MONKEY

SHANNON CONNOR WINWARD

The body of a woman was found in an elevator in Xi'an, China on March 1st, 2016 —thirty days after maintenance workers cut power and left to celebrate the New Year (year of the Red Fire Monkey).

Red Fire Monkey laughs from his perch *Unlucky, unlucky*

leftover woman Red Fire Monkey springs panel to panel

across the blood hanzi star mark zodiac of my hands, red, broken

monkey titters trapped, like me in Buddha's palm

the doors chomped tight but calm, so calm, red fire monkey grins

as I drown without water

without friends

screams unheard do not make a sound The days march on

a new year

outside—one

and one

but I have stopped not up, not down choking without smoke

dry fire

red monkey mocking,

mocking,

dancing

while I burn

WE BURY THE HEARTS1

Dom Fonce

Any cemetery

left to its own devices

has no choice but to latch onto your chest

and snatch out

of you both existence and expiration.

Especially here.

In Cleveland,

The Rockefellers' grave touches

the sun. They lay there both very rich

and very dead

Within my living room lay the

charred corpse of a great man.

It doesn't matter.

We bury the hearts first

all of us.

It doesn't matter.

We've grown cocoons

and hear the pitter-patter of rain, of sleet-

the over-glaze of freeze—here are our trophies.

We must shield our chests.

Within our shoeboxes,

our coffins,

our mausoleums underneath

monuments,

you, an outsider, can hear a small thump,

a dun-dun in the distance, symphonically mount

as the dead rise to click rocks

and tap sticks to a single beat,

dun-dun,

dun-dun,

dun-dun-

to make music,

to dance.

And here the country moves with us

as we drive out our red rivers.

SEVENTEEN

Ana Prundaru

Nose powdered, like you're an unburdened fruit you flirt your seventeen-year-old heart into speeding tickets and the morning puts her hand out, shape shifting writing through you in the dust: ça fait mal Do not worry if your breath tastes like you are breaking what breaks is asphalt and the morning undulates slippery down your coat

A nurse scolds you for throwing up the pills again you try to locate the electricity in you clearly you're out-of-synch; only one eye burning the lack of clothes suggests you're a love child albeit one who forgets how to swallow pills

After-morning lull and machines bruise with vital signs, you crush the pills in yoghurt like a free spirit if only flipping over earthquake-plagued geography was that easy smiles are almost creatures of folklore instead of lipstick, you draw fake freckles under your eyes and single handedly bring back the bed head look

You're seventeen at every rush hour looking through alleys for the time lost that laughs behind your back still blaming mornings, which fade in a blur orange-ripening, to the street next to you

^{1. &}quot;Ohio, The Heart of It All" is commonly known tourist slogan within the state of Ohio.

WAR ZONE

Ana Prundaru

you mourn stability in empty things meditate in the corpse pose empty wallets match empty rooms but no intention fits that hollow

to the sky, you're looking for fullness to people, you are anachronistically delightful their chatter dissolves behind curtained windows your bed becomes a confessional cabinet

how you want to inhabit spaces as bloodless bowls of your DNA the way morning quietly peels the horizon off your eyes for now, you fashion yourself to the tiniest adjectives of sickness

you take off your dress by the lake, count the mud flowers warming your joints the knot in your throat rounds you off to a harbor prayer-hands extend and break to ships sway away every regret you chuckle mouthfuls of cold sand the coast pulls up and ships capsize your limbs spill back to a vaguely familiar picture a shadow hovers above the pillow shakes the dead engine to flashing lights smile, like it's a picture

there was this imprisoned body orphaned in a folded image and just moments later it spilled out wet and butterflying an engulfment like a scream without a wide enough landing space seagulls suffused with diamond dust a gentle dark spell washes up on the shore not long and your stains will be everywhere

5 POEMS

Margarita Serafimova

A man dressed in black was descending towards the cemetery resplendent in white on the hill.

It was a few hours before the sun was to set.

~

The forest of rusty lava stands in the shape of wind.
World oaks at the edge.

~

Harbor

I am entering. The waters are sparkling.

_

I was a foreigner, and my shadow on the sunny path before me imparted strength.

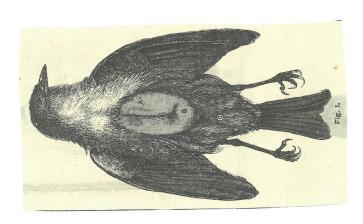
~

There was sadness. There weren't words. Time was flowing.

5 PIECES FROM ELEMENTARY GRAMMAR

ROBERT KEITH



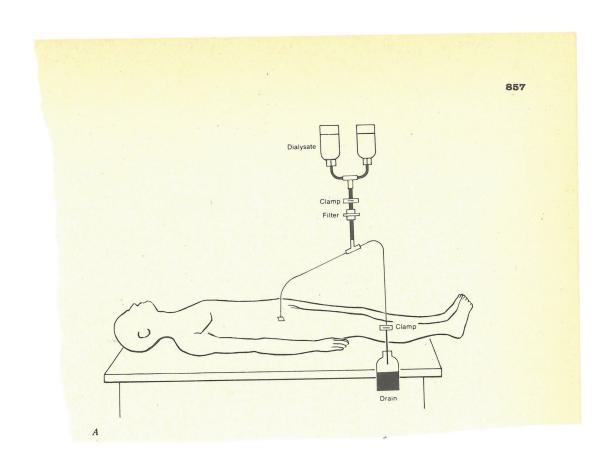


destroy forgive build lose reap
burn pursue ask assist answer

"Second" Finger



- 1. He laughs best who laughs last.
- 2. This is the book which you loaned me.
- 3. He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day.
- 4. How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done.
- 5. We were the first that ever burst into that silent sea.
- 6. The flame that lit the battle's wreck shone round him o'er the dead.
- 7. Nature never did betray the heart that loved her.
- 8. They had been friends in youth, but whispering tongues can poison truth.
- 9. You cannot have what you like, but you can like what you have.
- 10. Trust men, and they will be true to you: treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great.
- 11. Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just.
- 1. Big apples from the tree lay on the ground.
- 2. Strange sounds broke the stillness of the night.
- 3. Old moss-covered cottages rested peacefully under the trees.
- 4. The droning of the bees lulled the stranger to sleep.
- 5. The sound of the bell woke the sleeper.



A man may know the world without leaving his own home.

A man may know the world without leaving his own home.

A man may know the world without leaving his own home.

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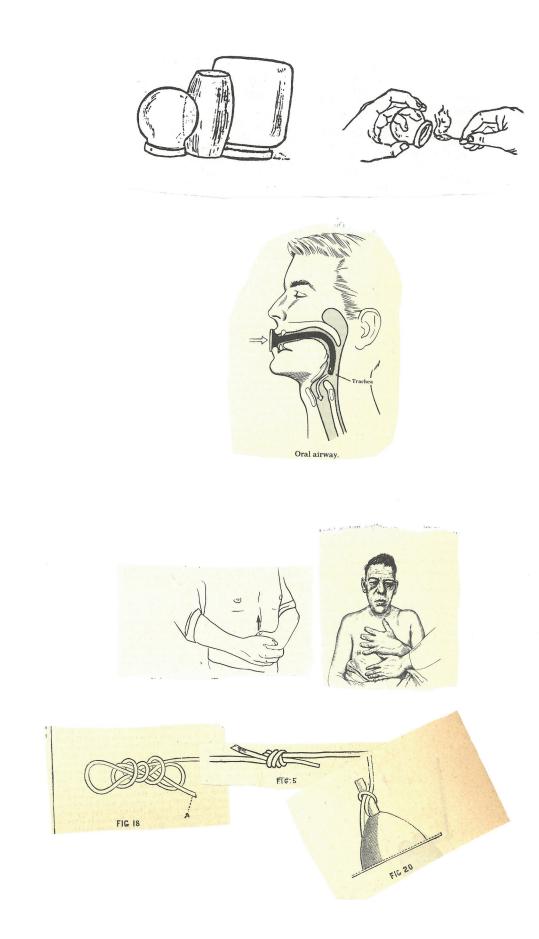
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Protruding upper teeth Protruding lower teeth



- 1. He waved his proud hand, and the trumpets were blown.
 - 2. Love had he found in huts where poor men lie.
 - 3. All things that love the sun are out of doors.
 - 4. What we have described occupied but a few
 - 5. That tree has been undermined by the recent floods.
 - 6. Something will be gained by delay.
 - 7. On either side the river lie

 Long fields of barley and of rye

 That clothe the wold and meet the sky.
 - 8. The breeze comes whispering in our ear
 That dandelions are blossoming near,
 That maize has sprouted, that streams are flowing,
 That the river is bluer than the sky,
 That the robin is plastering his house hard by.

LADY WILD COW DRINKS SOME WINE

MARY BUCHINGER

I am the thick-roped tongue of sun over your head lapping every pore.
I grow you and cancer you.
I ask only that you worship me, which is to say, remember I am above you.

I promise you nothing, son, except to follow you all your days, to tunnel the darkness of earth so you don't have to, and to make you forget your other mother, the one who'd give everything to fold you beneath her heavy green blanket.

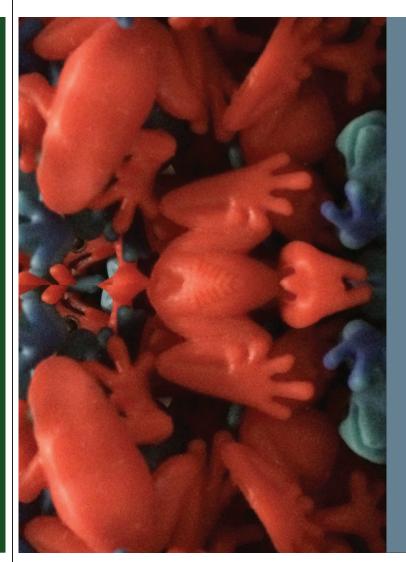
2 TEXT & IMAGE PIECES

MARK BLICKLEY AND AMY BASSIN



Excavating Dream From Nightmare

Know your place those that dare to dream as the fall is heavy with wonder over your sense of entitlement that asks what makes you so special pummeling against a suffocating rim in ecstatic abandon jubilating in the peculiar sense that surrounds you inside a suffocating plastic womb as you listen to the fluctuating wails from the tendrils of the wind slithering along ancient pitted walls to the mating ritual melody of romantic waltzes and pelvic thrusts that vibrate and stretch in angelic writhing unleashing a gale of erotic energy as percussions of sound carry you through different symphonies of movement that creates a longing for touch until such a need builds to echo your name inside the dark synthetic tunnel slick with sweat fighting to grasp the luminous bursts of light just beyond my reach as I fill my lungs again and again gasping for air while I dream of your hands and my memory of you in the ripple of a dance and the smell of sunshine that sends a thread of pleasure aching for contact until I can only pant in short gasps that threatens to smother me before I can implore you to come back to me and save me by taking what is already yours given freely under a liberating light of hope and passion you refuse to extend.



Leap of Faith

I'm a dead frog and I don't say this with any pity or understanding or shame it's just an observation that people seem to like us, like us a bit too much because they like to push hooks through our jaws and cast us out to sea as well as amputate us for fine dining and draw us as a cartoon shuffling cigar smoking smart skin infections while the evil ones enjoy tossing us into their steamy and have arrows dipped in our blood for killing others, and snakes like to slide along with our swallowed bulges straining inside their bellies, and we are stunned and frozen and sliced alive by school children with sharp tools, yet we still swim and splash and smile because the sun warms our cold blood and reflects our moist green that gives summer its most vibrant color, and the Chinese believe there is a toad in the moon not a man, and the Japanese consider us good luck, and that luck includes the growing of long legs to hop away from dinosaurs which is why we are the best leapers on precious jewel in our head and best of all, beneath the summer mance and camaraderie, sprinkled within a flying feast of buzzing will do just given the chance, a chance that will always destroy us.

SOME POETS ARE TRYING TO FIND MARCO RUBIO

RYAN RIVAS

JUAN FELIPE HERRERA CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S ORLANDO OFFICE

Another voice:

"Please come get us." Someone said — from below in the mist in the blood through the glass jagged & split. the soft-petaled arm as if in search of more death. Another voice (from above): "It could have lasted a whole song." through the dark from above — "It is heroic to save others lives." they have multiplied into our voices vour voices Listen: Lissen —

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S JACKSONVILLE OFFICE

Why don't you kick and howl, Tiny bit of humanity. Because you can lie so long and so quietly on your back, Playing with the dimpled big toe of your left foot, To grow up and be a banker —And make up your mind forthwith— Or a politician or some other sort of go-getter. Can it be that already you are thinking of being a poet? Rid yourself of these incipient thoughts.

DONALD JUSTICE CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S MIAMI OFFICE

A day like the days I remember, a day like other days, Speaking in Spanish softly, out of respect. And the sun will be bright then on the dark glasses of strangers. A day that nobody knows or remembers yet. I will die in Miami in the sun —while the diggers, standing apart, in the still shade of the palms, And my dog, quivering under a table because of the storm— When I took out this paper and began to write, And after awhile the diggers with their shovels... And the wind that today made all the little shrubs kneel down.

UNDER THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE, A FLUSTERED RYAN RIVAS CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S TAMPA OFFICE

"We are currently in the process of moving and finding a new office location. If you need immediate assistance, please contact us toll free in Florida at (866) 630-7106."

WALLACE STEVENS CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S PALM BEACH OFFICE

Foam and cloud are one, Are dissolving, On the palmy beach. There will never be an end To this droning of the surf. Fill your black hull And night blues, Sultry moon-monsters. Into the alabasters, Barque of phosphor.

JOHN DARNIELLE CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S TALLAHASSEE OFFICE

Half the whole town gone for the summer You Window facing an ill-kept front yard Road to the airport, two lanes clear There is no schedule There is no plan
We can fall back on prayers to summon the destroying angel
Plums on the tree heavy with nectar Moon stuttering in the sky like a film stuck in a projector

A DISGRUNTLED COPYWRITER FOR THE VISIT PENSACOLA WEBSITE, WHO MOONLIGHTS AS A POET, CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S PENSACOLA OFFICE

homes that speak to us as humans.

an imaginary battle.

It's in our nature to explore, build, and protect. Visitors to Pensacola and Perdido Key can explore the ruins of ancient.

Millions of people are drawn here every year to delve.

Set one or more kids loose and they will eventually build a fort.

There's something about touring old military forts... There are endless sites and stories to explore.

Wars at historic forts.

Walk in the footsteps of settlers and soldiers.

Stir up the occasional ghost at the lighthouse.

Ancestors lived.

We learn something about ourselves.

RYAN RIVAS CALLS MARCO RUBIO'S WASHINGTON DC OFFICE

What did you dream about, when you were little?

Was it Mexicans, born in Honduras, Cuban upon arrival, wringing out dishrags in Little Havana? Romantic rail riders, clinging to trains, hair tempest-tost? A forest of limbs recovered by border patrol—fodder for the new colossus? You know, the immigrant story?

There is more ocean now than ever before. On a shore lined with wretched refuse I am looking through the porthole of my condo. Each morning the cart comes by for the bodies.

What does it mean to be American?

.

Shut the fuck up.

Have a beer with me, play a round of golf. Let's go deep-sea fishing for refugees. Let's eat at nationalist hamburger stands and pretend to be white.

I think I could fall in love with you.

Your use of logical fallacies while pointing out my logical fallacies will eventually become endearing.

Let's grow old together on a barge in the federal waters of Miami.

We'll hang patriotic bunting

and try to discern the writing our fathers scrubbed so hard to make our slates blank when they first arrived in this country.

We'll look out at the ocean from our porch

and watch the bandwagons float by in pieces

and rank the great inaugural poets,

and the dictators who disappeared them.

HOW EVE GOT IT

TRACIE MORRIS

inspired by Michal Lemberger's talk at ACA on her short story collection, After Abel

In all the p-ix she's fruitful Posing, composed or ask-ance, (Her gangsta lean-to.)

She's grown or a girl, zaftig or Straight, strategic tresses, placed. Our left, her right, holds

Something as someone/thing Looks, on her. He looks and he looks. It's snap-shut, charged air, sensibility.

Once, someone thought of this, brushed it (off). Then everyone else. (She got pallor, pilloried despite The story's locale.) In the pout of belly

That is part of her gravity shift, there's a whole ...there's hole in the story. (You know how the joke goes.) Where's it from? Who gave Adam the right to get his?

No gestation from them two: the same as The apes threw Kubrik's projected bone. Born into parthogenetics.

Herland speculated, in a way, sans anthro. (He's a he) she's a she. They came From a guy, a clouded guy. The snake saw(s) the tree, slips in.

Where'd they get that gap where the world burned? It was a foretold story them leaving, there's proof In the eye of the mind of the stroker, the color.

The milk's way in empty, indented cavity. An out-ty, actually, into inner space --Their own corpus. That they name now, that's now

Their own. (All of us fit in there, so they say.)
Like dust, a Lenten aperture. A lintel on the hoist
Of hips that gathers residue of stars, starts, beyond the canopy.

 $^{1. \} The \ Orlando \ section \ rearranges \ lines \ from \ ``i \ Will \ Lov \ U \ 4Ever, \ Orlando \ ``by \ Juan \ Felipe \ Herrera.$

^{2.} The Jacksonville section rearranges lines from "A Poet to His Baby Son" by James Weldon Johnson.

^{3.} The Miami section rearranges lines from "Variations on a Text by Vallejo" by Donald Justice.

^{4.} The Tampa section consists of a quote from Marco Rubio's website. Due to large weekly protests at Rubio's Tampa office, the owner of the building where the office was located asked Rubio to move out.

^{5.} The Palm Beach section rearranges lines from "Fabliau of Florida" by Wallace Stevens.

^{6.} The Tallahassee section rearranges lines from "Tallahassee" by John Darnielle / The Mountain Goats.

^{7.} he Pensacola section rearranges lines from the Visit Pensacola website.

^{8.} The DC section samples phrases from "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus.

POEM IN TWO VOICES / POEMA EN DOS VOCES

EMILY STRAUSS

I want to write in other voices I have been reading Spanish lately

El humo de la orilla del mar

The sounds so full and round in my mouth, crystal marbles on the tongue

Bajo de nubes gruesos

translations pale to one side inadequate to plumb the depths

Alrededor pasa el espumo

mere shadows of Castillo swept with the tears of men

Brilliante, ni modo el día Quebrado por ciertas palabras

where poetry shimmers on corners lost with the fading guitar notes— I want to capture them

Qué palabras desechadas Qué palabras fuertes

my words don't match the sea brilliant in Valencian skies

> La arena muerta al fondo Donde camino yo Sigue constante

I am not Spanish, not so fine without black lace the smell of olives on my hands

> Y regreso hasta fin Al principio de la mañana

orange groves don't call me to beaches with sardine nets Donde tus brazos me entregaron Y dormí en las hierbas santas

I read Lorca and the others passionate teller of bullfights and death

El aire puro de la luna

in tones hollowed by grief red wine tinged

Un rio de plata resplandeciente Me bañe en sus aguas Mis manos humildes

echoes of an ancient culture warmer than the songs of night pouring from a dark courtyard

> Toco el sal de tus ojos Y lloro a lado de las olas

I will never become la morena.

BIOS

Beatriz L. Seelaender was born in 1998 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and is the author of the novel *De Volta ao Vazio*. Seelaender has recently been trying her hand at English, and her work has been published in journals such as New Grub Street, the Manifest-Station and the Feminine Collective. She is a student of Literature at the University of Sao Paulo.

Karen Quevillon is an award-winning poet and creative writer. Originally educated as a philosopher, she made a 'linguistic turn' several years ago and began freelancing as a copywriter and social media maven. She currently works as a college program manager (Seneca College, Toronto), where she has also taught part-time courses in creative writing, literature and liberal studies subjects. She lives in Hamilton, Ontario with her two creative kids and their guinea pigs.

Sean Patrick Whiteley is 28 years-old and resides outside of Boston, Massachusetts.

Jessica Lee Richardson, a New Jersey native, lived in Brooklyn and performed Off-Broadway and elsewhere for years before earning her MFA in fiction from the University of Alabama in 2013. Her short story collection, *It Had Been Planned* and *There Were Guides* (FC2, 2015), won the Ronald Sukenick Innovative Fiction Prize and was longlisted for a PEN American Center award. Stories and poems also won awards from the National Society of Arts and Letters and the F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald Museum and have been featured online at *The Short Form*, *Ploughshares*, and the Authonomy Sunday Shorts Series by Harper Collins. Her fictions have appeared in some great journals. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Coastal Carolina University and working on several new books. Her and her dog June live by the beach. They are visited occasionally by turtles, herons, gators, foxes, frogs, swans, mud salamanders and humans.

Daniel Belanger has had stories published in *Tigershark*, *Dark Matter*, *Home Planet News*, *Mobius*, *The Milo Review*, *Bellowing Ark*, *City Primeval*, *Lynx Eye*, *RE:AL* and the *Art Times*. He leads a quality improvement program aimed at improving HIV healthcare and ending the HIV epidemic in NYS. He has an MSW degree from Hunter College and a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature from Clark University.

Jordan Bolay studies questions of trace—the politics of presence in the archive—as a doctoral candidate in the University of Calgary's English Department. His readings and writings sprawl across the imagined boundaries, metaphorical grey zones, and ideological hinterlands of the creative and the critical, the original and the adapted. His poetry has appeared in *Found* (Malform Press, 2016), his fiction has appeared in *NōD* (vol. 21, 2017), and his long-poem "how to make an English exam interesting" is forthcoming from *The Blasted Tree*.

T.R. North was born and raised in Florida and has never been featured in a "News of the Weird" column run in another state. Follow @northonthegulf for more news.

Grant Price is a writer and photographer living in Berlin, Germany.

Carmen Carrión Edwards' fiction has previously been published in *CALYX* literary journal, *The Caribbean Writer*, and *The Acentos Review*, among others.

J.H. Martin is from London, England but has no fixed abode. His writing has appeared in a number of places in Asia, Europe and the USA. For more information, please visit: acoatforamonkey.wordpress.com.

Clio Velentza lives in Athens, Greece, and is a winner of *Best Small Fictions 2016*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in several literary journals, including (b)OINK, *Corium, The Letters Page, Jellyfish Review* and *Wigleaf*. Find her @clio_v.

Hannah Craig lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is the author of *This History that Just Happened* (Parlor Press, 2017). Her work has recently appeared in journals like the *Mid-American Review*, *North American Review*, and *Copper Nickel*. She was the winner of the 2015 New Measure Poetry Prize and the 2016 Mississippi Review Poetry Prize.

Vincent Poturica's writing appears or is forthcoming in *New England Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *New Ohio Review*, among other journals. He lives with his wife and daughter in Long Beach, CA, where he teaches at local community colleges.

Lasher Lane has worked many years for Prentice-Hall's art department in book composition and is published in *Volume 1 Brooklyn's Sunday Stories*, *Hippocampus*, *The Zodiac Review*, *Down in the Dirt* and *Foliate Oak*.

Phoebe Cramer is a writer and performer living in Brooklyn, NY. Her past work has appeared in *NonBinary Review*, *The Dart*, *Slink Chunk Press*, and *Bard Papers*. She can be found, occasionally, on twitter @PhoebeLCramer.

Jennie MacDonald is an author, playwright, and photographer living in Denver, Colorado. Her photograph "Breathless" was a recent finalist in the London Photo Festival; other images can be seen at National Geographic's Your Shot website. Her literary work has appeared in *NonBinary Review*, *Dante's Heart*, and *Finery*, among others. She received her Ph.D. in Literary Studies at the University of Denver and publishes on 18th and 19th century literature, theatre, and paratextual theory.

Andréa Acker is a visual artivist from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Ashley Parker Owens is a writer, poet, and artist living in Richmond, Kentucky.

Desmond Herzfelder is a joint U.S.-Colombian citizen who likes to do artworks that show both the similarities and differences between the two countries. Last year, Desmond's self-portrait done with exacto knife and scratch paper won third prize in the juried competition at the South Shore Art Festival in Cohasset, Massachusetts.

Megan Larmie received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Florida's School of Art and Art History. Larmie's work has been exhibited in Florida, Colorado, and Washington D.C. She lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Shannon Connor Winward is the author of the Elgin-award winning chapbook, *Undoing Winter*. Her work has appeared in *The Monarch Review, Qu, Fantasy & Science Fiction, Analog, The Pedestal Magazine, Literary Mama*, and *The Vestal Review* among others. In between writing, parenting, and other madness, Shannon is also a poetry editor for Devilfish Review and founding editor of Riddled with Arrows Literary Journal.

Dom Fonce is an undergraduate English major at Youngstown State University. He's had work published in the *Jambar*, *Penguin Review*, and *UMU Calliope*, and has had work accepted in forthcoming issues of *3Elements Review* and *West Texas Literary Review*.

Ana Prundaru is a multidisciplinary artist living in Switzerland. She has been published in *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, Thrice Fiction, 3:AM Magazine, CALYX* and *Kyoto Journal*, among other places. Her latest poetry collection "Anima" is forthcoming from dancing girl press.

Margarita Serafimova's first collection of poetry, Animals and Other Gods (Sofia University Press) was published in Bulgarian 2016. Her second book, Demons and World, also in the Bulgarian, is forthcoming in May 2017 (Black Flamingo Publishing, Sofia). In English, pieces of hers are forthcoming in Agenda, Trafika Europe, London Grip New Poetry, A-Minor, The Birds We Piled Loosely, Ginosko Literary Journal, Misty Mountains Review, and appear in Cent Magazine, Noble/ Gas Quarterly, Window Quarterly/ Patient Sounds, MockingHeart Review, The Renegade Rant and Rave, Tales From The Forest, Peacock Journal, In Between Hangovers, Anti-Heroin Chic, Outsider Poetry, Heavy Athletics, The Voices Project. Find her on Facebook.

Author of *Chicken Scratch* (eyeameye books), *re: verbs* (Bareback editions), *Signature Move* (KFS press) and four chapbooks, **Robert Keith** has been a member of the Filling Station collective. He studied creative writing at Capilano University in Vancouver. Other work has been published by *The Puritan*, *ditch*, *West Coast Line*, *The Incongruous Quarterly*, *steel bananas*, *The Capilano Review*, *Enpipe Line* and *Poetry Is Dead*.

Mary Buchinger, author of two poetry books, *Aerialist* and *Roomful of Sparrows*, has work published in *AGNI*, *Gargoyle*, *Nimrod*, *PANK*, *Salamander*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and elsewhere. Mary is co-President of the New England Poetry Club and Professor of English and Communication Studies at MCPHS University in Boston, Massachusetts.

Amy Bassin and Mark Blickley collaborate on text based art collaborations and videos. Their text based art collaboration, Dream Streams, was featured as an art installation at the 5th Annual NYC Poetry Festival held at Governors Island. They have published numerous excerpts from this series, including in Columbia Journal of Literature and Art. Their

video, Speaking In Bootongue, was recently selected for the London Experimental Film Festival. Their text-based art chapbook, *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate Quotes From the Underground* (Moria Books, Chicago). The publisher has sent it to the White House and members of Congress.

Ryan Rivas is the publisher of Burrow Press, an independent organization based in Orlando. While this bio may not convey his enthusiasm for doing such cool stuff, he assures you he is sufficiently ecstatic about it.

Tracie Morris is a poet who has worked extensively as a page-based writer, sound poet, critic, scholar, bandleader, actor and multimedia performer. Tracie holds an MFA in Poetry from Hunter College, has studied classical British acting technique extensively at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and American acting techniques at Michael Howard Studios. Tracie holds a PhD in Performance Studies from New York University. She is a former CPCW Poetics fellow of the University of Pennsylvania. She is a member of the Modern Language Association, Associated Writing Programs, The Shakespeare Society and The Shakespeare Forum. Tracie is Professor and Coordinator of Performance + Performance Studies at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York.

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry, which she has written since college. Over 400 of her poems appear in a wide variety of online venues and in anthologies, in the U.S. and abroad. She is both a Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee. The natural world of the American West is generally her framework; she also considers the narratives of people and places around her. She is a semi-retired teacher living in California.

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Lucianna Chixaro Ramos, Editor-in-Chief, Obra/Artifact

CREDITS

PROSE EDITOR

Nikki Fragala Barnes + Lucianna Chixaro Ramos

POETRY EDITOR/PDF DESIGN

Lucianna Chixaro Ramos

COPY EDITOR

Nikki Fragala Barnes

READER

Jacklyn Gion

FACULTY ADVISOR

Juan Carlos Reyes



THANK YOU FOR YOUR **SUPPORT**

